Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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THE FIREMAN
By Ray Bradbury

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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Next issue at your newsstand first week in February

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Yardstick for Science Fiction

AMONG readers, writers and business rivals, there is no doubt that GALAXY has succeeded enormously. Of these, only our competitors are baffled by these phenomena:

● GALAXY is naive enough to believe in the publishing platitudes of good characterization, believable situations, credible conflict, all of which have been talked up for years while the opposite was used.

Whether GALAXY really does use them can be attested to by a letter from an author whose name would be instantly recognized:

". . . I opened the first issue with interest but without any special expectation, one way or the other. I recognized your name on the masthead . . . and I was impressed with both the ambitious format and the table of contents names. Then I read it, almost at one sitting—and realized I was reading the first fully adult science fiction magazine I had ever held in my hands!

". . . Frankly, I didn't think you could keep it up more than one issue, being fairly sure that there was not that much good stuff to be had. But the second issue was as good as the first and so was the third . . .

"The quality of everything that has appeared in GALAXY is so high that, when I write for it, I want to be represented by my best work."

Guess at the name if you wish; you may even be right . . . but I'll hold it until I have a definite announcement to make.

Yes, there *is* enough good stuff to be had, now that writers are convinced GALAXY *wants* them to discard the shabby wrappings in which science fiction has been embalmed; mummified, almost.

This policy was inevitable, for it merely applies the standards of *any* legitimate branch of literature to science fiction. I don't want to keep this policy exclusively ours, for I do not fear *good* competition, which can expand the field immensely, but I am mortally afraid of retread private eye, western and Congo Sam stories masquerading as science fiction.

● As I mentioned in an earlier editorial, reader-editor collaboration has often been offered, seldom meant. It *was* meant in GALAXY, despite warnings even from readers that the screwballs might demand old hat science fiction. *None did.*

If GALAXY is a superior maga-

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zine it is due to reader participation and guidance!

● GALAXY has received the excited support of the best writers of science fiction. These authors were not misled by party girls on our payroll, nor drugged into submitting. They came voluntarily because of our challenging editorial policy and the highest rates in the field. And just as important . . .

● GALAXY buys only *first magazine publication rights*. We retain no other rights at all, whether radio, pocketbook, anthologization, or any other sort. *We demand not a single cent of the payment for the resale of any GALAXY story!*

This point may be obscure to non-writers, but it is of vital concern to authors. Vital enough, I believe, for readers to have it explained to them.

Counting false starts, stories that won't work out, stories that shouldn't have been written at all but seemed good at the time, research, productive labor, etc., it takes a stupendous amount of writing at even the highest rates to support an author and his family on magazine sales alone.

Any additional income a story can bring in, through anthologization, pocketbook reprint, or other resale, is important to him.

Realizing this, GALAXY does not use fictitious excuses to deprive writers of this income, such as regarding them as business infants who must be protected against their inclination to give their work away for nothing—while demanding a share of resale price.

● Because of our higher rates and refusal to cut in on earnings that are not ethically a magazine publisher's, GALAXY is, as a natural consequence, getting the finest science fiction stories.

Also as a consequence, apparently, "Needle" by Hal Clement will not be the current GALAXY *Science Fiction* Novel, though announced last month. A fraction of the book first appeared in another magazine, and since it is that publisher's policy to retain reprint rights, it has been refused us, despite the wishes of the author and the publishers of the clothbound edition.

Hal Clement has thus suffered a *serious financial loss—a guarantee* of almost the original price of the story, and royalties that could very possibly make it much more—through having his interests "protected."

It is dubious protection that can cancel a sale for an author and yet often involve a demand for a substantial part of the payment. In some cases, this demand may amount to as much as the original price of the story.

We regret being unable to offer this fine book . . . but we do have an ORIGINAL novel, "Prelude to Space" by Arthur C. Clarke. It's good! And it's still only 25¢.

—H. L. GOLD

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THE FIREMAN

By RAY BRADBURY

A master of science fiction presents his masterwork of frightening conviction . . . the world of the future WE are creating!

I

Fire, Fire, Burn Books

THE four men sat silently playing blackjack under a green drop-light in the dark morning. Only a voice whispered from the ceiling:

"One thirty-five a.m. Thursday morning, October 4th, 2052, A.D. . . . One forty a.m. . . . one fifty . . ."

Mr. Montag sat stiffly among the other firemen in the fire house, heard the voice-clock mourn out the cold hour and the cold year, and shivered.

The other three glanced up.

"What's wrong, Montag?"

A radio hummed somewhere. ". . . War may be declared any

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Illustrated by KARL ROGERS

hour. This country stands ready to defend its destiny and . . ."

The fire house trembled as five hundred jet-planes screamed across the black morning sky.

The firemen slumped in their coal-blue uniforms, with the look of thirty years in their blue-shaved, sharp, pink faces and their burnt-colored hair. Stacked behind them were glittering piles of auxiliary helmets. Downstairs in concrete dampness the fire monster itself slept, the silent dragon of nickel

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and tangerine colors, the boa-constrictor hoses, the twinkling brass.

"I'm thinking of our last job," said Mr. Montag.

"Don't," said Leahy, the fire chief.

"That poor man, when we burned his library. How would it feel if firemen burned *our* houses and *our* books?"

"We haven't any books."

"But if we *did* have some."

"You *got* some?"

"No."

Montag gazed beyond them to the wall and the typed lists of a million forbidden books. The titles cringed in fire, burning down the years under his ax and his fire hose spraying not water but—kerosene.

"Was it always like this?" asked Mr. Montag. "The fire house, our duties? I mean, well, once upon a time . . ."

"Once upon a time!" Leahy crowed. "What kind of language is *that?*"

Fool, cried Montag to himself. You'll give yourself away! That last fire. A book of fairy tales. He had dared to read a line or so. "I mean," he said, quickly, "in the old days, before homes were completely fireproof, didn't firemen ride to fires to put them out, instead of *start* them?"

"I never knew that." Stoneman and Black drew forth their rule books and laid them where Montag, though long familiar with them, might read:

1. Answer the alarm quickly.
2. Start the fire swiftly.
3. Be sure you burn everything.
4. Report back to fire house.
5. Stand alert for another alarm.

Everyone watched Montag.

He swallowed. "What will they do to that old man we caught last night with his books?"

"Insane asylum."

"But he wasn't insane!"

"Any man is who thinks he can hide books from the Government or us." Leahy blew a great fiery cloud of cigar smoke from his thin mouth. He idled back.

The alarm sounded.

The bell kicked itself two hundred times in a few seconds. Suddenly there were three empty chairs. The cards fell in a snow flurry. The brass pole trembled. The men were gone, their hats with them. Montag still sat. Below, the orange dragon coughed to life.

Montag slid down the pole like a man in a dream.

"Montag, you forgot your hat!"

He got it and they were off, the night wind hammering about their siren noise and their mighty metal thunder.

IT WAS a flaking three-story house in the old section of town. A century old if it was a day, but, like every house, it had been given a thin fireproof plastic coat fifty

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years ago, and this preservative shell seemed to be holding it up.

"Here we are!"

The engine slammed to a stop. Leahy, Stoneman, and Black ran up the sidewalk, suddenly odious and fat in their plump slickers. Montag followed.

They crashed the front door and caught a woman, running.

"I didn't hurt anyone!" she cried.

"Where are they?" Leahy twisted her wrist.

"You wouldn't take an old woman's pleasures from her, would you?"

Stoneman produced the telephone alarm card with the complaint signed in facsimile duplicate on the back. "Says here, Chief, the books are in the attic."

"All right, men, let's get 'em!"

Next thing they were up in musty blackness, swinging silver hatchets at doors that were, after all, unlocked, tumbling through like boys all rollick and shout.

"Hey!"

A fountain of books sprayed down on Montag as he climbed shuddering up the steep stair well. Books bombarded his shoulders, his pale face. A book lit, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon. In all the rush and fervor, Montag had only an instant to read a line, but it blazed in his mind for the next minute as if stamped there with a fiery iron. He dropped the book. Immediately, another fell into his arms.

"Montag, come on up!"

Montag's hand closed like a trap, crushed the book with wild devotion, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were hurling shovelfuls of literature into the dusty air. They fell like slaughtered birds and the woman stood like a small girl among the bodies.

"Montag!"

He climbed up into the attic.

" 'This too shall pass away.' "

"What?" Leahy glared at him.

Montag froze, blinking. "Did I *say* something?"

"Move, you idiot!"

THE books lay in piles like fishes left to dry.

"Trash! Trash!" The men danced on the books. Titles glittered their golden eyes, falling, gone.

"Kerosene!"

They pumped the cool fluid from the white snake they had twined upstairs. They coated every book; they pumped rooms full of it.

"This is better than the old man's place last night, eh?"

That had not been as much fun. The old man had lived in an apartment house with other people. They had had to use controlled fire there. Here, they could ravage the entire house.

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They ran downstairs, Montag reeling after them in the kerosene fumes.

"Come on, woman!"

"My books," she said, quietly. She knelt among them to touch the drenched leather, to read the gilt titles with her fingers instead of her eyes, while her eyes accused Montag.

"You can't take my books," she said.

"You know the law," said Leahy. "Pure nonsense, all of it. No two books alike, none agreeing. Confusion. Stories about people who never existed. Come on, now."

"No," she said.

"The whole house'll burn."

"I won't go."

The three men walked clumsily to the door. They glanced back at Montag who stood near the woman.

"You're not leaving her *here?*" he protested.

"She won't come."

"But she's got to!"

Leahy raised his hand. It contained the concealed igniter to start the fire. "Got to get back to the station. Besides, she'd cost us a trial, money, jail."

Montag placed his hand around the woman's elbow. "You can come with me."

"No." She actually focused her eyes on him for a moment. "Thank you, anyway."

"I'm counting to ten," said Leahy. "One, two . . ."

"Please," said Montag.

"Go on," said the woman.

"Three," said Leahy.

"Come." Montag pulled at her.

"I want to stay here," she replied, quietly.

"Four . . . five . . ."

The woman twisted. Montag slipped on an oily book and fell. The woman ran up the stairs half way and stood there with the books at her feet.

"Six . . . seven . . . Montag," said Leahy.

Montag did not move. He looked out the door at that man there with the pink face, pink and burned and shiny from too many fires, pink from night excitements, the pink face of Mr. Leahy with the igniter poised in his pink fingers.

Montag felt the book hidden against his pounding chest.

"Go get him!" ordered Leahy.

THE men dragged Montag yelling from the house.

Leahy backed out after them, leaving a kerosene trail down the walk. When they were a hundred feet away, Montag was still shouting and kicking. He glanced wildly back.

In the front door where she had come to gaze out at them quietly, her quietness a condemnation, staring straight into Leahy's eyes, was the woman.

Leahy twitched his finger to ignite the fuel.

He was too late. Montag gasped.

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The woman in the door, reaching with contempt toward them all, struck a match against the saturated wood.

People ran out of houses all down the street.

"WHO is it?"

"Who would it be?" said Mr. Montag, leaning back against the closed door in the dark.

His wife said, at last, "Well, put on the light."

"I don't want the light," he said. "Come to bed."

He heard her roll impatiently; the springs squeaked. "Are you drunk?"

He worked out of his coat and let it slump to the floor. He held his pants out into an abyss and let them fall forever and forever into darkness.

His wife said, "What *are* you doing?"

He balanced in space with the book in his sweating, icy hand.

A minute later, she said, "Well, don't just stand there in the middle of the room."

He made a small sound.

"What?" she asked.

He made more soft sounds. He stumbled toward the bed and shoved the book clumsily under the cold pillow. He fell into bed and his wife cried out, startled. He lay separate from her. She talked to him for what seemed a long while and when he didn't reply but only made sounds, he felt her hand creep over, up along his chest, his throat, his chin. Her hand brushed his cheek. He knew that she pulled her hand away from his cheek wet.

A long time later when he was finally floating into sleep, he heard her say, "You smell of kerosene."

"I always smell of kerosene," he mumbled.

Late in the night he looked over at Mildred. She was awake. There was a tiny dance of melody in the room. She had her thimble-radio tamped into her ear, listening, listening to far people in far places, her eyes peeled wide at deep ceilings of blackness. Many nights in the last ten years he had found her with her eyes open, like a dead woman. She would lie that way, blankly, hour upon hour, and then rise and go soundlessly to the bath. You could hear faucet water run, the tinkle of the sedatives bottle, and Mildred gulping hungrily, frantically, at sleep.

She was awake now. In a moment she would rise and go for the barbiturates.

"Mildred," he thought.

And suddenly she was so strange that he couldn't believe that he knew her at all. He was in someone else's house, like those jokes men told about the gentleman, drunk on life, who had come home late at night, unlocked the wrong door, entered a wrong room. And now here Montag lay in the strange night by this unidentified body he had never seen before.

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"Millie?" he called.

"What!"

"I didn't mean to startle you. What I want to know is, when did we meet? And *where?*"

"For what?"

"I mean originally."

She was frowning in the dark.

HE CLARIFIED it. "The first time we ever met, where was it, and when?"

"Why, it was at . . ."

She stopped.

"I don't know."

He was frightened. "Can't you remember?"

They both tried.

"It's been so long."

"Only ten years. We're both only thirty!"

"Don't get excited, I'm trying to think." She laughed a strange laugh. "How funny, not to remember where or when you met your husband or wife."

He lay with his eyes tight, pressing, massaging his brow. It was suddenly more important than any other thing in a lifetime that he knew where he had met Mildred.

"It doesn't matter." She was up, in the bathroom now. He heard the water rushing, the swallowing sound.

"No, I guess not," he murmured.

And he wondered, did she take twenty tablets now, like a year ago, when we had to pump her stomach, and me shouting to keep her awake, walking her, asking her why she did it, why she wanted to die, and she saying she didn't know, she didn't know, she didn't know anything about anything!

She didn't belong to him; he didn't belong to her. She didn't know herself, him, or anyone; the world didn't need her, she didn't need herself, and in the hospital he had realized that if she died he would not cry. For it was the dying of an unknown, a street face, a face in the newspaper, and it was suddenly so wrong that he had begun to cry, not at death but at the thought of *not* crying at death, a silly empty man beside an empty woman while the doctors emptied her still more.

And why are we empty, lonely, and not in love? he had asked himself, a year ago.

They were never together. There was always something between, a radio, a televisor, a car, a plane, a game, nervous exhaustion, or, simply, a little pheno-barbitol. They didn't know each other; they knew things, inventions. They had applauded science while it had built a beautiful glass structure, a glittering miracle of contraptions about them, and, too late, they had found it to be a glass wall. They could not shout through the wall; they could only pantomime silently, never touching, hearing, barely seeing each other.

Looking at Mildred at the hospital, he had thought, does it matter if we live or die?

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That might not have been enough if the people had not moved next door with their daughter.

Perhaps that had been the start of his awareness of his job, his marriage, his life.

ONE night—it was so long ago—he had gone out for a long walk. In the moonlight, he realized that he had come out to get away from the nagging of his wife's television set. He walked, hands in pockets, blowing steam from his mouth into the cold air.

"Alone." He looked at the avenues ahead. "By God, I'm alone. Not another pedestrian in miles." He walked swiftly down street after street. "Why, I'm the only pedestrian in the entire city!" The streets were empty and long and quiet. Distantly, on crosstown arteries, a few cars moved in the dark. But no other man ventured upon the earth to test the use of his legs. In fact, it had been so many years since the sidewalks were used that they were buckling, becoming obscured with grass.

So he walked alone, aware of his loneliness, until the police car pulled up and flashed its cold white light upon him.

"What're you doing?" shouted a voice.

"I'm out for a walk."

"He says he's out for a walk."

The laughter, the cold, precise turning over of his identity cards, the careful noting of his address.

"Okay, mister, you can *walk* now."

He had gone on, stomping his feet, jerking his mouth and hands, eyes blazing, gripping his elbows. "The nerve! The nerve! Is there a law against pedestrians!"

The girl turned a corner and walked toward him.

She stopped and glanced at him.

"Why, hello," she said, and put out her hand. "You're my neighbor, aren't you?"

"Am I?" he said.

She was smiling quietly. "We're the only live ones, aren't we?" She waved at the empty sidewalks. "Did the police stop you, too?"

"Walking's a cri... "

"They flashed their lig... ...e, but saw I was a woman—" She was no more than sixteen, Montag estimated, with eyes and hair as dark as mulberries, and a paleness about her that was not illness but radiance. "Then they drove away. I'm Clarisse McClellan. And you're Mr. Montag, the fireman."

They walked together. And she began to talk for both of them.

"It's a graveyard, this town," she said. "I like to walk just to keep my franchise on the sidewalks."

He looked and it was true. The city was like a dark tomb, every house deep in television dimness, not a sound or move anywhere.

"HAVE you ever noticed all the cars rushing?" she asked. "On the big boulevards down that

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way, day and night. I sometimes think they don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly. If you showed them a green blur, oh, yes! they'd say, that's grass! A pink blur, yes, that's *roses!*" She laughed to herself. "A white blur's a house. Quick brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slow on a highway once. They threw him in jail. Isn't that funny and sad, too?"

"You think of a lot of things for a girl," said Montag, uneasily.

"That's because I've got time to think. I never watch t-v or go to games or races or funparks. So I've lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess. Have you seen the two hundred-foot-long billboards in the country? Well, did you know that once billboards were only twenty-five feet long? But cars started going by so quickly, they had to stretch the advertising out so it could be seen."

"I didn't know that." Montag laughed abruptly.

"Bet I know something else you don't."

"What?"

"There's dew on the grass in the morning."

He couldn't remember, and suddenly it frightened him.

"And, if you look, there's a man in the moon."

He had never looked. His heart beat rapidly.

They walked the rest of the way in silence. When they reached her house, its lights were all blazing. It was the only house, in a city of a million houses, with its lights burning brightly.

"What's going on?" Montag had never seen that many house lights.

"Oh, just my mother and father and uncle sitting around, talking. It's like being a pedestrian, only rarer."

"But what do they *talk* about?"

She laughed at this, said good night, and was gone.

At three in the cold morning, he got out of bed and stuck his head out the front window. The moon was rising and there was a man in the moon. Over the broad lawn, a million jewels of dew sparkled.

"I'll be damned," said Montag, and went back to bed.

HE SAW Clarisse many afternoons and came to hope he would be seeing her, found himself watching for her sitting on her green lawn, studying the autumn leaves with a fine casual air, or returning from a distant woods with wild yellow flowers, or looking at the sky, even while it was raining.

"Isn't rain nice?" she said.

"I hadn't noticed."

"Believe me, it *is* nice."

He always laughed embarrassedly. Whether at her, or at himself, he wasn't sure. "I believe you."

"Do you really? Did you ever smell old leaves? Don't they smell like cinnamon? Here!"

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"Why, it is cinnamon, yes!"

She gazed at him with her clear dark eyes. "My gosh, you don't really know very much, do you?" She was not unkind, just concerned for him.

"I don't suppose any of us know much."

"I do," she said, quietly, "because I've time to look."

"Don't you attend school?"

"Oh, no. They say I'm anti-social. I don't mix. And the yelling bully is the thing among kids this season, you know."

"It's been a long season," observed Montag, and stood somewhat shocked at his own perception.

"Then you've noticed?"

"Yes. But what about your friends?"

"I haven't any. That's supposed to prove I'm abnormal. But they're always packed around the t-v, or racing in cars, or shouting or beating one another. Do you notice how people hurt one another nowadays?"

"You sound ancient."

"I am. I know about rain. That makes me ancient to them. They kill each other. It didn't used to be that way, did it? Children killing each other all the time? Four of my friends have been shot in the past year. I'm afraid of children."

"Maybe it was always this way."

"My father says his grandfather remembered when children didn't kill each other, when children were seen and not heard. But that was a long time ago, when they had discipline and responsibility. Do you know, I'm disciplined? I'm spanked when I need it, and I've responsibility. I do all the shopping and housecleaning. By hand."

"And you know about rain," said Mr. Montag, with the rain beating on his hat and coat.

"It tastes good if you lean back and open your mouth. Go on."

He leaned back and gaped.

"Why," he said, "it's *wine*."

THAT had not been the end of it. The girl had talked to him one bright afternoon and given him the dandelion test.

"It proves you're in love or not."

She brushed a dandelion under his chin.

"What a shame! You're not in love with anyone."

And he thought, when did I stop loving Mildred? and the answer was never! for he had never known her. She was the pale, sad goldfish that swam in the subterranean illumination of the television parlor; her natural habitat.

"It's the dandelion you use," protested Montag.

"No," said Clarisse, solemnly. "You're not in love. A dandelion won't help." She tossed the flower away. "Well, I've got to go see my psychiatrist. My teachers are sending me to him. He's trying to make me normal."

"I'll throttle him if he does!"

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"Right now he's trying to figure out why I go away from the city and walk in the forests once a day. Have you ever walked in a forest? No? It's so quiet and lovely, and nobody rushing. I like to watch the birds and the insects. They don't rush."

Before she left him to go inside, she looked at him suddenly and said, "Do you know, Mr. Montag, I can't believe you're a fireman."

"Why not?"

"Because you're so nice. Do you mind if I ask one last question?"

"I don't mind."

"Why do you do what you *do?*"

But before he knew what she meant or could make a reply, she had run off, embarrassed at her own frankness.

"What did she mean, why do I do what I do?" he said to himself. "I'm a fireman, of course. I burn books. Is *that* what she meant?"

He didn't see Clarisse for a month. He watched for her every day, but made no point of her absence to his wife. He wanted to go rap on her parents' door, but decided against it; he didn't want them misunderstanding his interest in the child. But after thirty-six days had passed, he brought Clarisse's name up offhand.

"Oh, her?" said Mildred, with the radio music jarring the table plates. "Why, didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

"She was killed by an automobile a month ago."

"A month! But why didn't someone tell me?"

"Didn't I? I suppose it slipped my mind. Yes, a car hit her."

"Did they find whose car it was?"

"No. You know how those things are. What do you want for supper, frozen steak or chops?"

AND so Clarisse was dead. No, disappeared! for in a large city you didn't die, you simply vanished. No one missed you, no one saw you go; your death was as insignificant as that of a butterfly carried secretly away, caught in the radiator grille of a speeding car.

And with Clarisse's death, half of the world was dead, and the other half was instantly revealed to him for what it was.

He saw what Mildred was and always would be, what he himself was but didn't want to be any more. And he saw that it was no idle thing, Mildred's suicidal attempts, the lovely dark girl with the flowers being ground under a car; it was a thing of the world they lived in. It was a part of the screaming, pressing down of people into electric molds. It was the meaningless flight of civilization down a rotary track to smash its own senseless tail. Mildred's flight was trying to die and escape nothingness, whereas Clarisse had been fighting nothingness with something, with being aware instead of forgetting, with walking instead of sitting, with go-

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ing to get life instead of having it brought to her.

And this civilization had killed her for her trouble. Not purposely, no, but with a fine ironic sense; for no purpose at all. Killed by a vanilla-faced idiot racing nowhere for nothing and irritated that he had been detained 120 seconds while the police investigated and released him on his way to some distant base which he must tag frantically before running for home.

Montag felt the slow gathering of awareness. Mildred. Clarisse. The firemen. The murdering children. Last night, the old man's books burned and him in an asylum. Tonight, that woman burned before his eyes. It was such a nightmare that only another nightmare, less horrible, could be used to escape from it, and Clarisse had died weeks ago and he had not seen her die, which made it somehow crueler and yet more bearable.

"Clarisse. Clarisse."

Montag lay all night long, thinking, smelling the smoke on his hands, in the dark.

HE HAD chills and fever in the morning.

"You can't be sick," said Mildred.

He closed his eyes upon the hotness. "Yes."

"But you were all right last night."

"No, I wasn't all right." He heard the radio in the parlor.

Mildred stood over his bed, curiously. He felt her there; he saw her without opening his eyes, her hair burned by chemicals to a brittle straw, her eyes with a kind of mental cataract unseen but suspect far behind the pupils, the reddened pouting lips, the body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting, and her flesh like raw milk. He could remember her no other way.

"Will you bring me an analgesic and water?"

"You've got to get up," she said. "It's noon. You've slept five hours later than usual."

"Will you turn the radio off?" he asked.

"That's my favorite program."

"Will you turn it off for a sick man?"

"I'll turn it down."

She went out of the room and did nothing to the radio and came back. "Is that better?"

"Thanks."

"That's my favorite program," she repeated, as if she had not said it a thousand times before.

"What about the analgesic?"

"You've never been sick before." She went away again.

"Well, I'm sick now. I'm not going to work tonight. Call Leahy for me."

"You acted funny last night." She returned, humming.

"Where's the analgesic?" He glanced at the water glass.

"Oh." She walked to the bath again. "Did something happen?"

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"A fire, that's all."

"I had a nice evening," she said, in the bathroom.

"What doing?"

"Television."

"What was on?"

"Programs."

"What programs?"

"Some of the best ever."

"Who?"

"Oh, you know, the big shows."

"Yes, the big shows, big, big, big." He pressed at the pain in his eyes and suddenly the odor of kerosene made him vomit.

Mildred came in, humming. She was surprised. "Why'd you do that?"

He looked with dismay at the floor. "We burned an old woman with her books."

"It's a good thing the rug's washable." She fetched a mop and swabbed clumsily at it. "I went to Helen's last night."

"Couldn't you get the shows on your own t-v?"

"Sure, but it's nice visiting."

"Did Helen get over that finger infection?"

"I *didn't notice.*"

SHE went out into the living room. He heard her by the radio, singing.

"Mildred?" he called.

She returned, singing, snapping her fingers softly.

"Aren't you going to ask me about last night?" he said.

"What about it?"

"We burned a thousand books and a woman."

"*Forbidden* books."

The radio was exploding in the parlor.

"Yes. Copies of Plato and Socrates and Marcus Aurelius."

"Foreigners?"

"Something like that."

"Then they were radicals."

"All foreigners can't be radicals."

"If they wrote books, they were." Mildred fiddled with the telephone. "You don't expect me to call Mr. Leahy, do you?"

"You must!"

"Don't shout."

"I wasn't shouting!" He was up in bed, suddenly, enraged and flushed, shaking. The radio roared in the hot air. "I can't call him. I can't tell him I'm sick."

"Why?"

Because you're afraid, he thought, pretending illness, afraid to call Leahy because after a moment's discussion the conversation would run so: "Yes, Mr. Leahy, I feel better already. I'll be in at ten o'clock tonight."

"You're *not sick,*" said Mildred

Montag fell back in bed. He reached under his pillow and groped for the hidden book. It was still there.

"Mildred, how would it be if—well, maybe I quit my job a while?"

"You want to give up everything? After all these years of working, because, one night, some woman and her books—"

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"You should have seen her, Millie!"

"She's nothing to me. She shouldn't have had books. It was her responsibility; she should've thought of that. I hate her. She's got you going and next thing you know we'll be out, no house, no job, nothing."

"You weren't there, you didn't see," he said. "There must be something in books, whole worlds we don't dream about, to make a woman stay in a burning house. There must be something fine there. You don't stay and burn for nothing."

"She was simple-minded."

"She was as rational as you or I, more so, and we burned her."

"That's water under the bridge."

"No, not water, Millie, but fire. You ever seen a burned house? It smolders for days. Well, this fire'll last me half a century. My God, I've been trying to put it out, in my mind, all night, and I'm crazy with trying."

"You should've thought of that before becoming a fireman."

"THOUGHT!" he said. "Was I given a choice? I was raised to think the best thing in the world is *not* to read. The best thing is television and radio and ball games and a home I can't afford and, Good Lord, now, only now I realize what I've done. My grandfather and father were firemen. Walking in my sleep, I followed them."

The radio was playing a dance tune.

"I've been killing the brain of the world for ten years, pouring kerosene on it. Millie, a book is a brain. It isn't only that woman we destroyed, or others like her, in these years, but it's the thoughts I burned and never knew it."

He got out of bed.

"It took some man a lifetime to put some of his thoughts on paper, looking after all the beauty and goodness in life, and then we come along in two minutes and heave it in the incinerator!"

"Let me alone," said Mildred.

"Let *you* alone!" He almost cried out with laughter. "Letting you alone is easy, but how can I leave *myself* alone? That's what's wrong. We need *not* to be let alone. We need to be upset and stirred and bothered, once in a while, anyway. Nobody bothers any more. Nobody thinks. Let a baby alone, why don't you? What would you have in twenty years? A savage, unable to think or talk—like us!"

Mildred glanced out the window. "Now you've done it. Look who's here."

"I don't give a damn." He was feeling better but didn't know why.

"It's Mr. Leahy."

The elation drained away. Mr. Montag slumped.

"Go open the door," he said, at last. "Tell him I'm sick."

"Tell him yourself."

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He made sure the book was hidden behind the pillow, climbed back into bed, and had made himself tremblingly uncomfortable, when the door opened and Mr. Leahy strolled in, hands in pockets.

"Shut the radio off," said Leahy, abstractedly.

This time, Mildred obeyed.

Mr. Leahy sat down in a comfortable chair with a look of strange peace in his pink face. He did not look at Montag.

"Just thought I'd come by and see how the sick man is."

"How'd you guess?"

"Oh." Leahy smiled his pink smile, and shrugged. "I'm an old hand at this. I've seen it all. You were going to call me and tell me you needed a day off."

"Yes."

"WELL, take a day off," said Leahy, looking at his hands. He carried an eternal match with him at times in a little case which said, *Guaranteed: One Million Cigarets Can Be Lit with this Match,* and kept striking this abstractedly against its case as he talked. "Take a day off. Take two. But *never* take three." He struck the match and looked at the flame and blew it out. "When will you be well?"

"Tomorrow, the next day, first of the week, I . . ."

"We've been wondering about you." Leahy put a cigar in his mouth. "Every fireman goes through this. They only need understanding, need to know how the wheels run, what the history of our profession is. They don't give it to rookies any more. Only fire chiefs remember it now. I'll let you in on it." He lit the cigar leisurely.

Mildred fidgeted.

"You ask yourself about the burning of books, why, how, when." Leahy exuded a great gray cloud of smoke.

"Maybe," said Montag.

"It started around about the Civil War, I'd say. Photography discovered. Fast printing presses coming up. Films at the early part of the 20th Century. Radio. Television. Things began to have mass, Montag, *mass*."

"I see."

"And because they had mass, they became simpler. Books, now. Once they appealed to various small groups of people, here and there. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of mass and elbows. Films and radios and magazines and books had to level down to a sort of paste-pudding norm. Do you follow me?"

"I think so."

Leahy looked through a veil of smoke, not at Montag, but at the thing he was describing. "Picture it. The 19th Century man with his horses, dogs, and slow living. You might call him a slow motion man. Then in the 20th Century you speed up the camera."

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"A good analogy."

"Splendid. Books get shorter. Condensations appear. Digests. Tabloids. Radio programs simplify. Everything sublimates itself to the gag, the snap ending."

"Snap ending." Mildred nodded approvingly. "You should have heard last night—"

"Great classics are cut to fit fifteen minute shows, then two minute book columns, then two line digest resumes. Magazines become picture books. Out of the nursery to the college, back to the nursery, in a few short centuries!"

MILDRED arose. She was losing the thread of the talk, Montag knew, and when this happened she began to fiddle with things. She went about the room, picking up.

"Faster and faster the film, Mr. Montag! *Quick, Click, Pic, Look, Eye, Now! Flick, Flash, Here, There, Swift, Up, Down, Why, How, Who, Eh?* Mr. Montag, digest-digests, political affairs in one column, a sentence, a headline, and then, in mid-air, vanish! The mind of man, whirling so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, publicists, ad men, broadcasters that the centrifuge throws off all ideas! He is unable to concentrate!"

Mildred was smoothing the bed now. Montag felt panic as she approached his pillow to straighten it. In a moment, with sublime innocence, she would be pulling the hidden book out from behind the pillow and displaying it as if it were a reptile!

Leahy blew a cumulus of cigar smoke at the ceiling. "School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling neglected, finally ignored. Life is immediate. The job counts. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting bolts?"

"Let me fix your pillow," said Mildred, being the video housewife.

"No," whispered Montag.

"The zipper replaces the button. Does a man have time to think while dressing in the morning, a philosophical time?"

"No," said Montag, automatically.

Mildred tugged at the pillow.

"Get away," said Montag.

"Life becomes one big Prat Fall, Mr. Montag. No more subtleties. Everything is bang and boff and wow!"

"Wow," reflected Mildred, yanking the pillow edge.

"For God's sake, let me be!" cried Montag, passionately.

Leahy stared.

Mildred's hand was frozen behind the pillow. Her hand was on the book, her face stunned, her mouth opening to ask a question . . .

"Theaters stand empty, Mr. Montag, replaced by television and

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baseball and sports where nobody has to think at all, not at all, at all." Now Leahy was almost invisible, a voice somewhere back of a choking screen of cigar smoke.

"What's this?" asked Mildred, with delight, almost. Montag crushed and heaved back against her hands. "What've you hid there?"

"Sit down!" Montag screamed. She jumped back, her hands empty. "We're talking!"

LEAHY continued, mildly. "Cartoons everywhere. Books become cartoons. The mind drinks less and less. Impatience. Time to kill. No work, all leisure. Highways full of crowds going somewhere, anywhere, nowhere. The gasoline refugee, towns becoming motels, people in nomadic surges from city to city, impatient, following the moon tides, living tonight in the room where you slept last night and I the night before."

Mildred went into the other room and slammed the door. She turned on the radio.

"Go on," said Montag.

"Intelligent writers gave up in disgust. Magazines were vanilla tapioca. The book buyer, bored by dishwater, his brain spinning, quit buying. Everyone but the comic-publisher died a slow publishing death. There you have it. Don't blame the Government. Technology, mass exploitation, and censorship from frightened officials did the trick. Today, thanks to them, you can read comics, confessions, or trade journals, nothing else. All the rest is dangerous."

"Yes, but why the firemen?" asked Montag.

"Ah," said Leahy, leaning forward in the clouds of smoke to finish. "With schools turning out doers instead of thinkers, with non-readers, naturally, in ignorance, they hated and feared books. You always fear an unfamiliar thing. 'Intellectual' became a swear word. Books were snobbish things.

"The little man wants you and me to be like him. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot out of the weapon. Unbreach men's minds. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? And so, when houses became all fireproof and there was no longer need of firemen for protection, they were given the new job, as official censors, judges, jurors, punishers. That's you, Mr. Montag, and me."

Leahy stood up. "I've got to get going."

Montag lay back in bed. "Thanks for explaining it to me."

"You must understand our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. People must be contented. Books bother them. Colored people don't like *Little Black Sambo*. We burn

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it. White people don't like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Burn it, too. Anything for serenity."

Leahy shook Montag's limp hand.

"Oh, one last thing. Once in his career, every fireman gets curious. What do the books say, he wonders. A good question. Well, they say nothing, Mr. Montag. Nothing you can touch or believe in. They're about non-existent people, figments. Not to be trusted. But anyway, say, a fireman 'takes' a book, at a fire, almost by 'accident.' A natural error."

"Natural."

"We allow that. We let him keep it 24 hours. If he hasn't burned it by then, we burn it for him."

"I see," said Montag. His throat was dry.

"You'll be at work tonight at six o'clock?"

"No."

"What!"

Montag shut his eyes. "I'll be in later, maybe."

"See that you do."

"I'll never come in again!" yelled Montag, but only in his mind.

"Get well."

Leahy, trailing smoke, went out.

MONTAG watched through the front window as Leahy drove away in his gleaming beetle which was the color of the last fire they had set.

Mildred had turned on the afternoon television show and was staring into the shadow screen.

Montag cleared his throat, but she didn't look up.

"It's only a step," he said, "from not working today, to not working tomorrow, to not working ever again."

"You're going to work tonight, though?"

"I'm doing more than that," he said. "I'm going to start to kill people and rave, and buy books!"

"A one-man revolution," said Mildred, lightly, turning to look at him. "They'd put you in jail, wouldn't they?"

"That's not a bad idea. The best people are there." He put his clothes on, furiously, walking about the bedroom. "But I'd kill a few people before I did get locked up. There's a real bastard, that Leahy. Did you *hear* him! Knows all the answers, but does nothing about it!"

"I won't even listen to all this junk," said Mildred.

"No?" he said. "This is your house as well as mine, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I have something I want you to see, something I put away and never looked at again during the past year, not even knowing why I put them away and hid them and kept them and never told you."

He dragged a chair into the hall, climbed up on it, and opened an air-vent. Reaching up, he began

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throwing books, big ones, little ones, red, yellow, green books, twenty, thirty, fifty books, one by one, swiftly, into the parlor at her feet. "There!"

"Leonard Montag! You *didn't!*"

"So you're not in this with me? You're in it up to your neck!"

She backed away as if she were surrounded by a pack of terrible rats. Her face was paled out and her eyes were fastened wide and she was breathing as if someone had struck her in the stomach. "They'll burn our house. They'll kill us."

"Let them try."

She hesitated; then, moaning, she seized a book and ran toward the fireplace.

He caught her. "No, Millie! No! Never touch my books. Never. Or, by God, if you do, touch just one of them meaning to burn it, believe me, Millie, I'll kill you."

"Leonard Montag! You *wouldn't!*"

HE SHOOK her. "Listen," he pleaded down into her face. He held her shoulders firmly, while her face bobbed helplessly, and tears sprang from her eyes.

"You must help me," he said, slowly, trying to find his way into her thinking. "You're in this now, whether you like it or not. I've never asked for anything in my life of you, but I ask it now, I plead it. We must start somewhere. We're going to read books. It's a thing we haven't done and must do. We've got to know what these books are so we can tell others, and so that, eventually, they can tell everyone. Sit down now, Millie, there, right there. I'll help you, we'll help each other. Between us, we'll do something to destroy men like Leahy and Stoneman and Black and myself, and this world we live in, and put it all back together a different way. Do you *hear* me?"

"Yes." Her body sagged.

The doorbell rang.

They jerked about to stare at the door and the books toppled everywhere, everywhere in heaps.

"Leahy!"

"It can't be him!"

"He's come back!" sobbed Mildred.

The bell rang again.

"Let him stand out there. We won't answer." Montag reached blindly for a book on the floor, any book, any beginning, any start, any beauty at all would do. He put the book into Mildred's shaking hands.

The bell rang a third time, insistently.

"Read." He quivered a hand to a page. "Out loud."

Mildred's eyes were on the door and the bell rang angrily, loudly, again and again. "He'll come in," she said, "oh, God, and set fire to everything, and us."

But at last she found the line, with Montag standing over her,

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swaying, any line in the book, and after trying it four times, she began to fumble out the words of a poem printed there on the white, unburned paper:

"And evening vanish and no more,
The low pale light across the
the land—"

The bell rang.

"Nor now the long light on the
sea—
And here face downward in the
sun . . ."

Another ring.

Montag whispered. "He'll go away in a minute."

Mildred's lips trembled:

"To feel how swift, how secretly
The shadow of the night comes
on . . ."

Near the ceiling, smoke from Leahy's cigar still lingered.

II

The Sieve and the Sand

THEY read the long afternoon through, while the fire flickered and blew on the hearth and the October rain fell from the sky upon the strangely quiet house. Now and again, Mr. Montag would silently pace the room, or bring in a bottle of cold beer and drink it easily or say, "Will you read that part over again? Isn't *that* an idea now?" And Mildred's voice, as colorless as a beer bottle which contains a rare and beautiful wine but does not know it, went on enclosing the words in plain glass, pouring forth the beauties with a loose mouth, while her drab eyes moved over the words and over the words and the rain rained and the hour grew late.

They read a man named Shakespeare and a man named Poe and part of a book by a man named Matthew and one named Mark. On occasion, Mildred glanced fearfully at the window.

"Go on," said Mr. Montag.

"Someone might be watching. That might've been Mr. Leahy at our door a while back."

"Whoever it was went away. Read that last section again. I want to understand that."

She read from the works of Jefferson and Lincoln.

When it was five o'clock her hands dropped open. "I'm tired. Can I stop now?" Her voice was hoarse.

"How thoughtless of me." He took a book from her. "But isn't it beautiful, Millie? The words, and the thoughts, aren't they exciting?"

"I don't understand any of it."

"But surely . . ."

"Just words."

"But you remember some of it."

"Nothing."

"You'll learn. It's difficult at first."

"I don't like books," she said. "I don't understand books. They're over my head. They're for profes-

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sors and radicals and I don't want to read any more. Please, promise you won't make me."

"Mildred!"

"I'm afraid," she said, putting her face into her shaking hands. "I'm so terribly frightened by these ideas, by Mr. Leahy, and having these books in the house. They'll burn our books and kill us. Now, I'm sick."

"I'm sorry," he said at last, sighing. "I've put you on trial, haven't I? I'm way out front, trying to drag you, when I should be walking beside you, barely touching. I expect too much. It'll take months to put you in the frame of mind where you can receive the ideas in these books. It's not fair of me. All right, you won't have to read aloud again."

"Thanks."

"But you must *listen*. I'll explain."

"I'll never learn. I just know I won't."

"You must if you want to be free."

"I'm free already. I couldn't be freer."

"You can't be free if you're not aware."

"Why do you want to ruin us with all this?" she asked.

"Listen," he said.

SHE listened.

Jet-bombers were crossing the sky over their house.

Those quick gasps in the heavens, as if a running giant had drawn his breath. Those sharp, almost quiet whistles, here and gone in so much less than an instant that one almost believed one had heard nothing. And seeing nothing in the sky, if you *did* look, was worse than seeing something. There was a feeling as if a great invisible fan was whirring blade after hostile blade across the stars, with giant murmurs and no motion, perhaps only a faint trembling of starlight. All night, every night of their lives, they had heard those jet sounds and seen nothing, until, like the tick of a clock or a time-bomb, it had come to be unnoticed, for it was the sound of today and the sound of today dying, the Cheyne-Stokes respiration of civilization.

"I want to know why and how we are where we are," said Montag. "How did those bombers get in the sky every instant? Why have there been three semi-atomic wars since 1960? Where did we take the wrong turn? What can we do about it? Only the books know this. Maybe the books can't solve my problem, but they can bring me out in the light. And they might stop us from going on with the same insane mistakes."

"You can't stop wars. There've always been wars."

"No, I can't. War's so much a part of us now that in the last three days, though we're on the very rim of war, people hardly mention it. Ignoring it, at least, isn't the an-

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swer. But now, about us. We must have a schedule of reading. An hour in the morning. An hour or so in the afternoon. Two hours in the evening—"

"You're not going to forbid me my radio, are you?" Her voice rose.

"Well, to start . . ."

She was up in a fury, raging at him. "I'll sit and listen if you want me to for a while every day," she cried. "But I've got to have my radio programs, too, and every night on the t-v—you can't take that away from me!"

"But don't you see? That's the very thing I'd like to counteract—"

The telephone rang. They both started. Mildred snatched it up and was almost immediately laughing. "Hello, Ann. Yes, oh, yes! Tonight, you come here. Yes, the White Clown's on tonight and the Terror will be fun."

Mr. Montag shuddered, sick. He left the room. He walked through the house, thinking.

Leahy, the fire house, these dangerous books.

"I'll shoot him tonight," he said, aloud. "I'll kill Leahy. That'll be one censor out of the way. No." He laughed coldly. "I'd have to shoot most of the people in the world. How does one start a revolution? I'm alone. My wife, as the saying goes, does not understand me. What can a single lonely man do?"

MILDRED was chattering. The radio was thundering, turned on again.

And then Mr. Montag remembered; about a month ago, walking through the park alone, he had come upon a man in a black suit, unaware. The man had been reading something. Montag hadn't seen a book; he had only seen the man move hastily, face flushed. The man had jumped up as if to run, and Montag had said, simply, "Sit down."

"I didn't do anything."

"No one said you did."

They had sat in the park all afternoon. Montag had drawn the man out. He was a retired professor of English literature, who had lost his job forty years before when the last college of fine arts had been closed. His name was William Faber, and shyly, fearfully, he admitted he had been reading a little book of American poems, forbidden poems which he now produced from his coat pocket.

"Just to know I'm alive," said Mr. Faber. "Just to know where I am and what things are. To sense things. Most of my friends sense nothing. Most of them can't talk. They stutter and halt and hunt words. And what they talk is sales and profits and what they saw on television the hour before."

What a nice afternoon that had been. Professor Faber had read some of the poems to Montag, none of which Montag understood, but

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the sounds were good, and slowly the meaning crept in. When it was all over, Montag said, "I'm a fireman."

Faber had looked as if he might die on the spot.

"Don't be afraid. I won't turn you in," said Montag hastily. "I stopped being mean about it years ago. You know, the way you talk reminds me of a girl I knew once, name of Clarisse. She was killed a few months ago by a car. But she had me thinking, too. We met each other because we took long walks. No one walks any more. I haven't seen a pedestrian in ten years on our street. Are you ever stopped by police simply because you're a pedestrian?"

He and Faber had smiled, exchanged addresses orally, and parted. He had never seen Faber again. It wouldn't be safe to know a former English literature professor. But now . . .?

He dialed a call.

"Hello, Professor Faber?"

"Who is this?"

"This is Montag. You remember? The park? A month ago?"

"Yes, Mr. Montag. Can I help you?"

"Mr. Faber." He hesitated. "How many copies of the Bible are left in the world?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about." The voice grew cold.

"I want to know if there are *any* copies at all."

"I can't discuss such things, Montag."

"This line is closed. There's no one listening."

"Is this some sort of trap? I can't talk to just anyone on the phone."

"Tell me, are there any copies?"

"None!" And Faber hung up.

None.

MONTAG fell back in his chair. None! None in all the world, none left, none anywhere, all, all of them destroyed, torn apart, burned. The Bible at last dead for all time to the world.

He got up shakily and walked across the room and bent down among the books. He took hold of one book and lifted it.

"The old and new testaments, Millie! One last copy and we have it here!"

"Fine," she said vaguely.

"Do you realize what it means, the importance of this copy here in our house? If anything should happen to this book, it would be lost forever."

"And you have to hand it back to Mr. Leahy tonight to be burned, don't you?" said Mildred. She was not being cruel. She was merely relieved that the one book, at least, was going out of her life.

"Yes."

He could see Leahy turning the book over with slow appreciation. "Sit down, Montag. I want you to watch this. Delicately, like a head

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of lettuce, see?" Ripping one page after another from the binding. Lighting the first page with a match. And when it had curled down into black wings, lighting the second page from the first and the third from the second, and so on, chain-smoking the entire volume chapter by printed chapter, all of the words and the wisdom. When it was finished, with Montag seated there sweating, the floor would resemble a swarm of black moths that had fluttered and died in one small storm. And Leahy smiling, washing his hands.

"My God, Millie, we've got to do something! We've got to copy this. There must be a duplicate made. This *can't* be lost!"

"You haven't time."

"No, not by hand. But if we could photograph it."

"No one would do it for you."

He stopped. She was right. There was no one to trust, except, perhaps, Professor Faber. Montag started for the door.

"You'll be here for the t-v party, won't you?" Mildred called after him. "It wouldn't be fun without you."

"You'd never miss me." But she was looking at the late afternoon t-v show and didn't hear. He went out and slammed the door, the book in his hand.

ONCE, as a child, he had sat upon the yellow dunes by the sea in the middle of the blue and hot summer day, trying to fill a sieve with sand. The faster he poured, the faster it sifted through with a hot whispering. He tried all day because some cruel cousin had said, "Fill this sieve and you'll get a dime!"

Seated there in the midst of July, he had cried. His hands were tired, the sand was boiling, the sieve was empty.

And now, as the jet-underground car roared him through the lower cellars of town, rocking him, jolting him, he remembered that frustrating sieve and he held this precious copy of the old and new testaments fiercely in his hands, trying to pour the words into his mind. But the words fell through, and he thought, in a few hours, I must hand this book to Leahy, but I must remember each word, no phrase must escape me, each line can be memorized. I must remember, I *must*.

"But I do not remember." He shut the book and pressed it with his fists and tried to force his mind.

"Try Denham's Dentifrice tonight!" screamed the radio in the bright, shuddering wall of the jet-train. Trumpets blared.

"Shut up," thought Mr. Montag in panic. "Behold, the lilies of the field—"

"Denham's Dentifrice!"

"They toil not—"

"Denham's Dentifrice!"

"Behold, the lilies of the field, shut up, let me remember!"

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"Denham's Dentifrice!"

He tore the book open furiously and flicked the pages about as if blind, tearing at the lines with raw eyes, staring until his eyelashes were wet and quivering.

"Denham's, Denham's, Denham's! D-E-N—"

"They toil not, neither do they . . ."

A whisper, a faint sly whisper of yellow sand through empty, empty sieve.

"Denham's does it!"

"Behold, the lilies—"

"No dandier dental detergent!"

"Shut up!" It was a shriek so loud, so vicious that the loudspeaker seemed stunned. Mr. Montag found himself on his feet, the shocked inhabitants of the loud car looking at him, recoiling from a man with an insane, gorged face, a gibbering wet mouth, a flapping book in his fist. These rabbit people who hadn't asked for music and commercials on their public trains but who had got it by the sewerful, the air drenched and sprayed and pummeled and kicked by voices and music every instant. And here was an idiot man, himself, suddenly scrabbling at the wall, beating at the loudspeaker, at the enemy of peace, at the killer of philosophy and privacy!

"Madman!"

"Call the conductor!"

"Denham's, Denham's Double Dentifrice!"

"Fourteenth Street!"

Only that saved him. The car stopped. Montag, thrown into the aisle by the grinding halt, rolled over, book in hand, leaped up past the pale, frightened faces, screamed in his mind soundlessly, and was out the opening door of the train and running on the white tiles up and up through tunnels, alone, that voice still crying like a seagull on a lonely shore after him, "Denham's, Denham's . . ."

PROFESSOR FABER opened the door, saw the book, seized it. "My God, I haven't held a copy in years!"

"We burned a house last night. I stole it."

"What a chance to take!"

Montag stood catching his breath. "I was curious."

"Of course. It's beautiful. Here, come in, shut the door, sit down." Faber walked with the book in his fingers, feeling it, flipping the pages slowly, hungrily, a thin man, bald, with slender hands, as light as chaff. "There were a lot of lovely books once. Before we let them go." He sat down and put his hand over his eyes. "You are looking at a coward, Mr. Montag. When they burned the last of the evil books, as they called them, forty years back, I made only a few feeble protestations and subsided. I've damned myself ever since."

"It's not too late. There are still books."

"And there is still life in me, and

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I'm afraid of dying. Civilizations fall because men like myself fear death."

"I've a plan," said Montag. "I'm in a position to do things. I'm a fireman; I can find and hide books. Last night I lay awake, thinking. We might publish many books privately when we have copies to print from."

"How many have been killed for that?"

"We'll get a press."

"We? Not we. You, Mr. Montag."

"You must help me. You're the only one I know. You *must.*"

"Must? What do you mean, *must?*"

"We could find someone to build a press for us."

"Impossible. The books are dead."

"We can bring them back. I have a little money."

"No, no." Faber waved his hands, his old hands, blotched with liver freckles.

"But let me tell you my plan."

"I don't want to hear. If you insist on telling me, I must ask you to leave."

"We'll have extra copies of each book printed and hide them in firemen's houses!"

"What?" The professor raised his brows and gazed at Montag as if a bright light had been switched on.

"Yes, and put in an alarm."

"Call the fire engines?"

"Yes, and see the engines roar up. See the doors battered down on firemen's houses for a change. And see the planted books found and each fireman, at last, accused and thrown in jail!"

The professor put his hand to his face. "Why, that's absolutely sinister."

"Do you like it?"

"The dragon eats his tail."

"You'll join me?"

"I didn't say that. No, no."

"BUT you see the confusion and suspicion we could spread?"

"Yes, plenty of trouble there."

"I've a list of firemen's homes all across the states. With an underground, we could reap fire and chaos for every blind bastard in the industry."

"You can't trust anyone, though."

"What about professors like yourself, former actors, directors, writers, historians, linguists?"

"Dead, or ancient, all of them."

"Good. They'll have fallen from public notice. You know hundreds of them. I know you must."

"Nevertheless, I can't help you, Montag. I'll admit your idea appeals to my sense of humor, to my delight in striking back. A temporary delight, however. I'm a frightened man; I frighten easily."

"Think of the actors alone, then, who haven't acted Shakespeare or Pirandello. We could *use* their anger, and the rage of historians who haven't written for forty years.

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We could start small classes in reading . . ."

"Impractical."

"We could try."

"The whole civilization must fall. We can't change just the front. The framework needs melting and remolding. Don't you realize, young man, that the Great Burning forty years back was almost unnecessary? By that time the public had stopped reading. Libraries were Saharas of emptiness. Except the Science Department."

"But—"

"Can you shout louder than radio, dance faster than t-v? People don't want to think. They're having fun."

"Committing suicide."

"Let them commit it."

"Murdering."

"Let them murder. The fewer fools there will be."

"A war is starting, perhaps tonight, and no one will even talk about it."

The house shook. A bomber flight was moving south. It had slowed to five hundred miles an hour and was trembling the two men standing there across from each other.

"Let the war turn off the t-vs and radio, and bomb the true confessions."

"I can't wait," said Montag.

"Patience. The civilization is flinging itself to pieces. Stand back from the centrifuge."

"There has to be another structure ready when this one falls," insisted Montag. "That's us."

"A bunch of men quoting Shakespeare and saying I remember Sophocles? It would be funny if it were not tragic."

"We've got to be there. We've got to remind those who are left that there are things more urgent than machines. We must remember that the right kind of work is happiness, instead of the wrong kind of leisure. We must give people things to do. We must make them feel wanted again."

"They will only war again. No, Montag, go on home and go to bed. It was nice seeing you. But it's a lost cause."

MONTAG paced about the room for a few moments, chafing his hands, then he returned and picked up the book and held it toward the other man.

"Do you see this book? Would you like to own it?"

"My God, yes! I'd give my right arm for it."

"Watch." Montag began ripping the pages out, one by one, dropping them to the floor, tearing them in half, spitting on them and rolling them into wads.

"Stop it!" cried Faber. "You idiot, stop it!" He sprang forward. Montag warded him off and went on tearing at the pages.

"Do you see?" he said, a fistful of pages in his tightening fist, flourishing them under the chin of the

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old man. "Do you see what it *means to have your heart torn out?* Do you see what *they* do?"

"Don't tear any more, please," said the old man.

"Who can stop me? You? I'm a fireman. I can do anything I want to do. Why, I could burn your house now, do you know that? I could burn everything. I have the power."

"You wouldn't!"

"No. I wouldn't."

"Please. The book; don't rip it any more. I can't stand that." Faber sank into a chair, his face white, his mouth trembling. "I see; I understand. My God, I'm old enough so it shouldn't matter what happens to me. I'll help you. I can't take any more of this. If I'm killed, it won't make any difference. I'm a terrible fool of an old man and it's too late, but I'll help you."

"To print the books?"

"Yes."

"To start classes?"

"Yes, yes, anything, but don't ruin that book, don't. I never thought a book could mean so much to me." Faber sighed. "Let us say that you have my limited cooperation. Let us say that part of your plan, at least, intrigues me, the idea of striking back with books planted in firemen's homes. I'll help. How much money could you get me today?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Bring it here when you can. I know a man who once printed our college paper. That was the year I came to class one morning and found only two students to sign up for Ancient Greek Drama. You see, that's how it went. Like an iceblock melting in the sun. And when the people had censored themselves into a living idiocy with their purchasing power, the Government, which of course represents the people's will, being composed of representative people, froze the situation. Newspapers died. No one cared if the Government said they couldn't come back. No one *wanted* them back. Do they now? I doubt it, but I'll contact a printer, Montag. We'll get the books started, and wait for the war. That's one fine thing; war destroys machines so beautifully."

MONTAG went to the door. "I'm afraid I'll have to take the Bible along."

"No!"

"Leahy guessed I have a book in the house. He didn't come right out and accuse me, or name the book . . ."

"Can't you substitute another book for this?"

"I can't chance it. It might be a trap. If he expects me to bring a Bible and I brought something else, I'd be in jail very quickly. No, I'm afraid this Bible will be burned tonight."

"That's hard to accept." Faber took it for a moment and turned the pages, slowly, reading.

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"I've tried to memorize it," said Montag. "But I forget. It's driven me crazy, trying to remember."

"Oh, God, if we only had a little time."

"I keep thinking that. Sorry." He took the book. "Good night."

The door shut. Montag was in the darkening street again, looking at the real world.

YOU could feel the war getting ready in the sky that night. The way the clouds moved aside and came back, and the way the stars looked, a million of them hovering between the clouds, like the enemy discs, and the feeling that the sky might fall upon the city and turn the homes to chalk dust, and the moon turn to red fire; that was how the night felt.

Montag walked from the subway stop with his money in his pocket—he had been to the bank which stayed open until all hours with mechanical tellers doling out the money—and as he walked he was listening abstractedly to the Seashell radio which you could cup to your ear. (Buy a Seashell and hear the Ocean of Time!) and a voice was talking to him and only him as he turned his feet toward home. "Things took another turn for the worse today. War threatens at any hour."

Always the same monologue. Nothing about causes or effects, no facts, no figures, nothing but sudden turns for the worse.

Seven flights of jet-rockets went over the sky in a breath. Montag felt the money in his pocket, the Bible in his hand. He had given up trying to memorize it now; he was simply reading it for the enjoyment it gave, the simple pleasure of good words on the tongue and in the mind. He uncupped the Seashell radio from his ear and read another page of the Book of Job by moonlight.

AT EIGHT o'clock, the front door scanner recognized three women and opened, letting them in with laughter and loud, empty talk. Mrs. Masterson, Mrs. Phelps, and Mrs. Bowles drank the martinis Mildred handed them, rioting like a crystal chandelier that someone has pushed, tinkling upon themselves in a million crystal chimes, flashing the same white smiles, their echoes repeated in empty corridors. Mr. Montag found himself in the middle of a conversation, the main topic of which was how nice everyone looked.

"Doesn't everyone look nice?"

"Real nice."

"You look fine, Alma."

"You look fine, too, Mildred."

"Everybody looks nice and fine," said Montag.

He had put the book aside. None of it would stay in his mind. The harder he tried to remember Job, for instance, the quicker it vanished. He wanted to be out paying this money to Professor Faber, get-

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ting things going, and yet he delayed himself. It would be dangerous to be seen at Faber's twice within a few hours, just in case Leahy was taking the precaution of having Montag watched.

Like it or not, he must spend the rest of the evening at home, and be ready to report to work at eleven so that Leahy wouldn't be suspicious. Most of all, Montag wanted to walk, but he rarely did this any more. Somehow he was always afraid that he might meet Clarisse, or not meet her again, on his strolls, so that kept him here standing among these blonde tenpins, bowling back at them with socially required leers and wisecracks.

Somehow the television set was turned on before they had even finished saying how nice everyone looked, and there on the screen was a man selling orange soda pop and a woman drinking it with a smile; how could she drink and smile simultaneously? A real stunt! Following this, a demonstration of how to bake a certain new cake, followed by a rather dreary domestic comedy, a news analysis that did not analyze anything and did not mention the war, even though the house was shaking constantly with the flight of new jets from four directions, and an intolerable quiz show naming the state capitals.

Montag sat tapping his fingers on his knee and exhaling.

Abruptly, he walked to the televisor and snapped it off.

"I thought we might enjoy a little silence."

Everyone blinked.

"Perhaps we might try a little conversation . . ."

"Conversation?"

THE house shook with successive waves of jet bombers which splashed the drinks in the ladies' hands.

"There they go," said Montag, watching the ceiling. "When do you suppose the war will start?"

"What war? There won't be a war."

"I notice your husbands aren't here tonight."

Mrs. Masterson glanced nervously at the empty t-v screen. "Oh, Dick'll be back in a week or so. The Army called him. But they have these things every month or so." She beamed.

"Don't you worry about the war?"

"Well, heavens, if there is one, it's got to be over with. We can't just sit and worry, can we?"

"No, but we can think about it."

"I'll let Dick think of it." A nervous giggle.

"And die maybe."

"It's always someone else's husband dies, isn't that the joke?" The women all tittered.

Yes, thought Montag, and even if Dick does die, what does it matter? We've learned the magic of the replaceable part from machines. You can't tell one man from an-

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other these days. And women, like so many plastic dolls—

Everyone was silent, like children with a schoolmaster.

"Did you see the Clarence Dove film last night?" said Mildred, suddenly.

"He's hilarious."

"But what if Dick should die, or *your* husband, Mrs. Phelps?" Montag insisted.

"He's dead. He died a week ago. Didn't you know? He jumped from the tenth floor of the State Hotel."

"I didn't know." Montag fell silent, embarrassed.

"But to get back to Clarence Dove . . ." said Mildred.

"Wait a minute," said Montag, angrily. "Mrs. Phelps, why did you marry your husband? What did you have in common?"

The woman waved her hands helplessly. "Why, he had such a nice sense of humor, and we liked the same t-v shows and—"

"Did you have any children?"

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Come to think of it, no one here has children," said Montag. "Except Mrs. Bowles."

"Four, by Caesarian section. It's easy *that* way."

"The Caesarians weren't necessary?"

"I always said I'd be damned if I'd go through all that agony just for a baby. Four Caesarians. Nothing to it, really."

Yes, everything easy. Montag clenched his teeth. To mistake the easy way for the right way, how delicious a temptation. But it wasn't living. A woman who wouldn't bear, or a shiftless man didn't belong; they were passing through. They belonged to nothing and did nothing.

"Have you ever thought, ladies," he said, growing more contemptuous of them by the moment, "that perhaps this isn't the best of all possible worlds? That perhaps our civil rights and other precious possessions haven't been taken away in the past century, but have, if anything, been given away by us?"

"Why, that can't be true! We'd have heard about it."

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"ON THAT pap-dispenser?" cried Montag, jerking his hand at the t-v. Suddenly he shoved his hand in his pocket and drew forth a piece of printed paper. He was shaking with rage and irritation and he was half blind, staring down at the twitching sheet before his eyes.

"What's that?" Mrs. Masterson squinted.

"A poem I tore from a book."

"I don't like poetry."

"Have you ever *heard* any?"

Mildred jumped up, but Montag said, coldly, "Sit down." The women all lit cigarets nervously, twisting their red mouths.

"This is illegal, isn't it?" squealed Mrs. Phelps. "I'm afraid. I'm going home."

"Sit down and shut up," said Montag.

The room was quiet.

"This is a poem by a man named Matthew Arnold," said Montag. "Its title is Dover Beach."

The women were all glancing with expectation at the television set, as if it might save them from this moment.

Montag cleared his throat. He waited. He wanted very much to speak the poem right, and he was afraid that he might stumble. He read.

His voice rose and fell in the silent room and he found his way through to the final verses of the poem:

"The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

The four women twisted in their chairs.

Montag finished it out:

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

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Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help
for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling
plain
Swept with confused alarms of
struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by
night."

Montag let the white piece of paper fall slowly to the floor. The women watched it flutter and settle.

Mildred said, "Can I turn the t-v on now?"

"No, God damn it, no!"

Mildred sat down.

Mrs. Masterson said, "I don't get it. The poem, I mean."

"What was it about?" asked Mrs. Phelps, her eyes darting fearfully in flashes of white and dark.

"Don't you *see?*" shouted Montag.

"Nothing to get upset about," said Mrs. Masterson, casually.

"But it is, it is."

"Just silly words," said Mrs. Masterson. "But, Mr. Montag, I don't mind telling you—it is only because you're a fireman that we haven't called in an alarm on you for reading this to us. It's illegal. But it's also very silly. It was nonsense." She got to her feet and mashed out her cigaret. "Ladies, don't you think it's time for us to leave?"

"I don't want to come back here, ever," said Mrs. Phelps, hurrying for the door.

"Please stay!" cried Mildred.

The door slammed.

"Go home and think of your first husband, Mrs. Masterson, in the insane asylum, and of Mr. Phelps jumping off a building!" yelled Montag through the shut door.

The house was completely abandoned. He stood alone.

In the bathroom, water was running. He heard Mildred shaking the sleeping tablets out into her palm.

"You fool," he said to himself. "You idiot. Now you've done it. Now you've ruined it all, you and your poem, you and your righteous indignation."

He went into the kitchen and found the books where Mildred had stacked them behind the refrigerator. He carried a selection of them into the back yard, hid them in the weeds near the fence. "Just in case," he thought, "Mildred gets a passion for burning things during the night. The best books out here; the others in the house don't matter."

He went back through the house. "Mildred?" he called at the bedroom door but there was no sound.

He shut the front door quietly and left for work.

"THANK you, Montag." Mr. Leahy accepted the copy of the Bible and, without even looking at it, dropped it into the wall incinerator. "Let's forget all about it. Glad to see you back, Montag."

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They walked upstairs.

They sat and played cards at one minute after midnight.

In Leahy's sight, Montag felt the guilt of his hands. His fingers were like ferrets that had done some evil deed, and now were never at rest, always stirring and picking and hiding in pockets, or moving out from under Leahy's alcohol-flame gaze. If Leahy so much as breathed on them, Montag felt that they might wither upon his wrists and die and he might never shake them to life again; they would be buried forever in his coat sleeves, forgotten.

For these were the hands that had acted on their own, that were no part of him, that were his swift and clever conscience, that snatched books, tore pages, hid paragraphs and sentences in little wads to be opened later, at home, by match-light, read and burned. They were the hands that in the last year had darted off with Shakespeare and Job and Ruth and shelved them away next his crashing heart, over the throbbing ribs and the hot, roaring blood of a man excited by his theft, appalled by his temerity, betrayed by ten fingers which at times he held up to watch as if they were gloved with blood.

The game proceeded. Twice in half an hour, Montag got up and went to the latrine to wash his hands. He came back. He sat down. He held his cards. Leahy watched his fingers fumble the cards.

"Not smoking, Montag?"

"I've a cigaret cough."

And then, of course, the smoke reminded him of old men and old women screaming and falling into wild cinders, and it was not good any more to hold fire in your hand.

He put his hands under the table. "Let's have your hands in sight," said Leahy, casually. "Not that we don't trust you."

They all laughed.

The phone rang.

MR. LEAHY, carrying his cards in one pink hand, walked slowly over and stood by the phone, let it ring twice more, and then picked it up.

"Yes?"

Mr. Montag listened, eyes shut.

The clock ticked in the room.

"I see," said Leahy. He looked at Montag. He smiled. He winked. Montag glanced away. "Better give me that address again."

Mr. Montag got up. He walked around the room, hands in pockets. The other two men were standing ready. Leahy jerked his head toward their coats, as if to say, "On the double!" They shoved their arms in their coats and pushed on their helmets, joking in whispers.

Mr. Montag waited.

"I understand perfectly," said Leahy into the phone. "Yes. Yes. Perfectly. No, that's all right. Don't you worry. We'll be right out."

Leahy deposited the receiver. "Well, well."

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"A call? Books to be burned?"

"So it seems."

Mr. Montag sat down heavily. "I don't feel well."

"What a shame; this is a special case," said Leahy, coming forward slowly, putting on his slicker.

"I think I'm handing in my resignation."

"Not yet, Montag. One more fire, eh? Then I'll be agreeable; you can hand in your papers. We'll all be happy."

"Do you mean that?"

"Have I ever lied to you?"

Leahy fetched a helmet. "Put this on. The job'll be over in an hour. I understand you, Montag, really I do. Everything will be just as you want it."

"All right."

They slid down the brass pole.

"Where's the fire?"

"I'll drive!" shouted Leahy. "I've got the address."

The engine blasted to life and in the gaseous tornado they all leaped aboard.

THEY rounded a corner in thunder and siren, with concussion of tires, with scream of rubber, with a shift of kerosene bulk in the glittery brass tank, like the food in the stomach of a giant, with Mr. Montag's fingers jolting off the silver rail, swinging into cold space, with the wind tearing his hair back from his bleak face, with the wind whistling in his teeth, and he all the while thinking of the women, the chaff women, with the kernels blown out from under them by a neon wind, and his reading a book to them.

What a silly thing it was now! For what was a book? Sheets of paper, lines of type. Why should he fret for books—one, two, or ten thousand of them, really? He was the only inhabitant of a burning world that cared, so why not drop it all, forget it, let the now-meaningless books lie?

"Here we go!" shouted Leahy.

"Elm Street?"

"Right!"

He saw Leahy up on his driver's throne, with his massive black slicker flapping out behind. He seemed to be an immense black bat flying above the engine, over the brass numbers, taking the wind. His pink, phosphorescent face glimmered in the high darkness, pressing forward, and he was smiling furiously.

"Here we go to keep the world happy!"

And Mr. Montag thought, "No, I can't let the books rot; I can't let them burn. As long as there are souls like Leahy, I can't hold my breath. But what can I do? I can't kill everyone. It's me against the world, and the odds too big for any man. What can I do? Against fire, what water is best?"

"Now over on Park Terrace!"

The fire engine boomed to a halt, throwing the men off in skips and clumsy hops. Mr. Montag stood fix-

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ing his raw eyes to the cold bright rail under his gripped fingers.

"I can't do it," he murmured. "I can't go in there. I can't rip another book."

Leahy jumped from his throne, smelling of the wind that had hammered him about. "Okay, Montag, fetch the kerosene!"

The hoses were snaked out. The men ran on soft boots, as clumsy as cripples, as quiet as deadly black spiders.

Mr. Montag turned his head.

"What's wrong, Montag?" Leahy asked, solicitously.

"Why," protested Montag, "that is *my* house."

"So it is," agreed Leahy, heartily.

All the lights were lit. Down the street, more lights were flicking on, people were standing on porches, as the door of Montag's house opened. In it, with two suitcases in her hands, stood Mildred. When she saw her husband, she came down the steps quickly, with a dreamlike rigidity, looking at the third button on his coat.

"Mildred!"

She said nothing.

"Okay, Montag, up with the hose and ax."

"Just a moment, Mr. Leahy. Mildred, you didn't telephone this call in, did you?"

SHE walked past him with her arms stiff and at the ends of them, in the sharp, red-nailed fingers, the valise handles. Her mouth was bloodless.

"You didn't!" he said.

She shoved the valises into a waiting taxi-beetle and climbed in and sat there, staring straight ahead.

Montag started toward her. Leahy caught his arm.

"Come on, Montag."

The cab drove away slowly down the lighted street.

There was a crystal tinkling as Stoneman and Black chopped the windows to provide fine drafts for the fire.

Mr. Montag walked but did not feel his feet touch the walk, nor the hose in his icy hands, nor did he hear Leahy talking continually as they reached the door.

"Pour the kerosene in, Montag."

Montag stood gazing in at the queer house, made strange by the hour of the night, by the murmur of neighbor voices, by the littered glass, the lights blazing, and there on the floor, their covers plucked off, the pages spilled about like pigeon feathers, were his incredible books, and they looked so pitiful and silly and not worth bothering with, for they were nothing but type and paper and raveled binding.

Montag stepped forward in a huge silence and picked up one of the pages of the books and read what it had to say.

He had read only three lines when Leahy snatched the paper from him.

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"Oh, no," he said, smiling. "Because then we'd have to burn your mind, too. Mustn't have that." He stepped back. "Ready?"

"Ready." Montag snapped the valve lock on the fire-thrower.

"Aim," said Leahy.

"Aim."

"Fire!"

He burned the television set first and then the radio and he burned the motion picture projector and he burned the films and the gossip magazines and the litter of cosmetics on a table, and he took pleasure in it all, and he burned the walls because he wanted to change everything, the chairs, the tables, the paintings. He didn't want to remember that he had lived here with some strange woman who would forget him tomorrow, who had gone and forgotten him already and was listening to a radio as she rode across town. So he burned the room with a precise fury.

"The books, Montag, the books!"

He directed the fire at the books. They leaped and danced, like roasted birds, their wings frantically ablaze in red and yellow feathers. They fell in charred lumps.

"Get that one there, get it!" directed Leahy, pointing.

Montag burned the indicated book.

He burned books, he burned them by the dozen, he burned books with sweat pouring down his cheeks.

"When you're all done, Montag," said Leahy behind him, "you're under arrest."

III

Water, Water, Quench Fire

THE house fell into red ruin. It bedded itself down to sleepy pink ashes and a smoke pall hung over it, rising straight to the sky. It was ten minutes after one in the morning. The crowd drew back into their houses; the fun was over.

Mr. Montag stood with the fire-thrower in his stiff hands, great islands of perspiration standing out under his arms, his face smeared with soot. The three other firemen waited behind him in the darkness, their faces illumined faintly by the burned house, by the house which Mr. Montag had just charred and crumpled so efficiently with kerosene, flame-gun, and deliberate aim.

"All right, Montag," said Leahy. "Come along. You've done your duty. Now, you're in custody."

"What've I done?"

"You know what you did. Don't ask."

"Why so much fuss over a few bits of paper?"

"We won't stand here arguing; it's cold."

"Was it my wife called you, or one of her friends?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Was it my wife?"

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Leahy nodded. "But her friends turned in an alarm earlier. I let it ride. One way or the other, you'd have got it. That was pretty silly, quoting poetry around free and easy, Montag. Very silly. Come on, now."

"I think not," said Montag.

He twitched the fire-trigger in his hand. Leahy glanced at Montag's fingers and saw what he intended before Montag himself had even considered it. In that instant, Montag was stunned by the thought of murder, for murder is always a new thing, and Montag knew nothing of murder; he knew only burning and burning things that people said were evil.

"I know what's really wrong with the world," said Montag.

"Look here, Montag—" cried Leahy.

And then he was a shrieking blaze, a jumping, sprawling, gibbering thing, all aflame, writhing on the grass as Montag shot three more blazing pulses of liquid fire over him. There was a hissing and bubbling like a snail upon which salt has been poured. There was a sound like spittle on a red-hot stove. Montag shut his eyes and yelled and tried to get his hands to his ears to cut away the sounds. Leahy twisted in upon himself like a ridiculous black wax doll and lay silent.

The other two firemen stood appalled.

"Montag!"

Montag jerked the weapon at them. "Turn around!"

They turned stiffly. He beat them over the heads with the gun shaft; he didn't want to burn any other thing ever again. They fell. Then Montag turned the fire-thrower on the fire engine itself, set the trigger, and ran. Voices screamed in several houses. The engine blew up, hundreds of gallons of kerosene in one great flower of heat.

Montag ran away down the street and into an alley, thinking, "That's the end of you, Leahy! That's the end of you and what you were!"

He kept running.

HE REMEMBERED the books and turned back.

"You're a fool, a damned fool, an awful fool, an idiot, but most of all a fool." He stumbled and fell. He got up. "You blind idiot, you and your pride and your stinking temper and your righteousness, you've ruined it all, at the very start, you fumbler. But those women, those stupid women, they drove me to it with their nonsense!" he protested to himself.

"A fool, nevertheless, no better than they!

"We'll save what we can. We'll do what has to be done. We'll take a few more firemen with us if we burn!"

He found the books where he had left them, beyond the garden fence. He heard voices yelling in

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the night and flashbeams were swirling about. Other fire engines wailed from far off and police cars were arriving.

Mr. Montag took as many books as he could carry under one arm and staggered down the alley. He hadn't realized what a shock the evening had been to him, but suddenly he fell and lay sobbing, weak, his legs folded, his face in the gravel. At a distance he heard running feet. Get up, he told himself. But he lay there. Get up, get up! But he cried like a child. He hadn't wanted to kill anyone, not even Leahy. Killing did nothing but kill something of yourself when you did it, and suddenly he saw Leahy again, a torch, screaming, and he shut his hand over his wet face, gagging. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Everything at once. In twenty-four hours the burning of a woman, the burning of books, the trip to the professor's, Leahy, the Bible, memorizing, the sieve and the sand, the bank money, the printing press, the plan, the rage, the alarm, Mildred's departure, the fire, Leahy into a torch—too much for any one day in any one life.

At last he was able to get to his feet, but the books seemed impossibly heavy. He fumbled along the alley and the voices and sirens faded behind him. He moved in darkness, panting.

"You must remember," he said, "that you've got to burn them or they'll burn you. Burn them or they'll burn you."

He searched his pockets. The money was there. In his shirt pocket he found the Seashell radio and slapped it to his ear.

"Attention! Attention, all police alert. Special alarm. Wanted: Leonard Montag, fugitive, for murder and crimes against the State. Description . . ."

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Six blocks away the alley opened out onto a wide empty thoroughfare. It looked like a clean stage, so bored, so quiet, so well lit, and him alone, running across it, easily seen, easily shot down.

"Beware of the pedestrian, watch for the pedestrian!" The Seashell stung his ear.

Montag hid back in the shadows. He must use only the alleys. There was a gas station nearby. It might give him the slightest extra margin of safety if he were clean and presentable. He must get to the station rest room and wash up, comb his hair, then, with books under arm, stroll calmly across that wide boulevard to get where he was going.

"Where *am* I going?"

NOWHERE. There was nowhere to go, no friend to turn to. Faber couldn't take him in; it would be murder to even try; but he had to see Faber for a minute or two, to give him this money. Whatever happened, he wanted the money to go on after him. Perhaps he could make it to open country, live on the rivers and near highways, in the meadows and hills, the sort of life he had often thought about but never tried.

Something caught at one corner of his vision and he turned to look at the sky.

The police helicopters were rising, far away, like a flight of gray moths, spreading out, six of them. He saw them wavering, indecisive, a half mile off, like butterflies puzzled by autumn, dying with winter, and then they were landing, one by one, dropping softly to the streets where, turned into cars, they would shriek along the boulevards or, just as suddenly, hop back into the air, continuing their search.

And here was the gas station. Approaching from the rear, Mr. Montag entered the men's wash room.

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Through the tin wall he heard a radio voice crying, "War has been declared! Repeat—war has been declared! Ten minutes ago—" But the sound of washing his hands and rinsing his face and toweling himself dry cut the announcer's voice away. Emerging from the washroom a cleaner, newer man, less suspect, Mr. Montag walked as casually as a man looking for a bus, to the edge of the empty boulevard.

There it lay, a game for him to win, a vast bowling alley in the dark morning. The boulevard was as clean as a pinball machine, but underneath, somewhere, one could feel the electrical energy, the readiness to dart lights, flash red and blue, and out of nowhere, rolling like a silver ball, might thunder the searchers! Three blocks away, there were a few headlights. Montag drew a deep breath. His lungs were like burning brooms in his chest; his mouth was sucked dry from running. All of the iron in the world lay in his dragging feet.

He began to walk across the empty avenue.

A hundred yards across. He estimated. A hundred yards in the open, more than plenty of time for a police car to appear, see him, and run him down.

He listened to his own loud footsteps.

A car was coming. Its headlights leaped and caught Montag in full stride.

"Keep going."

Montag faltered, got a new hold on his books, and forced himself not to freeze. Nor should he draw suspicion to himself by running. He was now one-third of the way across. There was a growl from the car's motor as it put on speed.

THE police, thought Montag. They see me, of course. But walk slowly, quietly, don't turn, don't look, don't seem concerned. Walk, that's it, walk, walk.

The car was rushing at a terrific speed. A good one hundred miles an hour. Its horn blared. Its light flushed the concrete. The heat of the lights, it seemed, burned Montag's cheeks and eyelids and brought the sweat coursing from his body.

He began to shuffle idiotically, then broke and ran. The horn hooted. The motor sound whined higher. Montag sprinted. He dropped a book, whirled, hesitated, left it there, plunged on, yelling to himself, in the middle of concrete emptiness, the car a hundred feet away, closer, closer, hooting, pushing, rolling, screeching, the horn hunting, himself running, his legs up, down, out, back, his eyes blind in the flashing glare, the horn nearer, now on top of him!

They'll run me down, they know who I am, it's all over, thought Montag, it's done!

He stumbled and fell.

An instant before reaching him, the wild car swerved around him

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and was gone. Falling had saved him.

Mr. Montag lay flat, his head down. Wisps of laughter trailed back with the blue car exhaust.

That wasn't the police, thought Mr. Montag.

It was a carful of high-school children, yelling, whistling, hurrahing. And they had seen a man, a pedestrian, a rarity, and they had yelled "Let's get him!" They didn't know he was the fugitive Mr. Montag; they were simply out for a night of roaring five hundred miles in a few moonlit hours, their faces icy with wind.

"They would have killed me," whispered Montag to the shaking concrete under his bruised cheek. "For no reason at all in the world, they would have killed me."

He got up and walked unsteadily to the far curb. Somehow, he had remembered to pick up the spilled books. He shuffled them, oddly, in his numb hands.

"I wonder if they were the ones who killed Clarisse."

His eyes watered.

The thing that had saved him was falling flat. The driver of that car, seeing Montag prone, considered the possibility that running over a body at one hundred miles an hour might turn the car over and spill them all out. Now, if Montag had remained upright, things would have been far different . . .

Montag gasped. Far down the empty avenue, four blocks away, the car of laughing children had turned. Now it was racing back, picking up speed.

Montag dodged into an alley and was gone in the shadow long before the car returned.

THE house was silent.

Mr. Montag approached it from the back, creeping through the scent of daffodils and roses and wet grass. He touched the screen door, found it open, slipped in, tiptoed across the porch, and, behind the refrigerator in the kitchen, deposited three of the books. He waited, listening to the house.

"Mrs. Black, are you asleep up there?" he asked of the second floor in a whisper. "I hate to do this to you, but your husband did just as bad to others, never asking, never wondering, never worrying. You're a fireman's wife, Mrs. Black, and now it's your house, and you will be in jail a while, for all the houses your husband has burned and people he's killed."

The ceiling did not reply.

Quietly, Montag slipped from the house and returned to the alley. The house was still dark; no one had heard him come or go.

He walked casually down the alley, and came to an all-night, dimly lighted phone booth. He closed himself in the booth and dialed a number.

"I want to report an illegal ownership of books," he said.

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The voice sharpened on the other end. "The address?"

He gave it and added, "Better get there before they burn them. Check the kitchen."

Montag stepped out and stood in the cold night air, waiting. At a great distance he heard the fire sirens coming, coming to burn Mr. Black's house while he was away at work, and make his wife stand shivering in the morning air while the roof dropped down. But now she was upstairs, deep in sleep.

"Good night, Mrs. Black," said Mr. Montag. "You'll excuse me—I have several other visits to make."

A RAP at the door.

"Professor Faber!"

Another rap and a long waiting. Then, from within, lights flickered on about the small house. After another pause, the front door opened.

"Who is it?" Faber cried, for the man who staggered in was in the dark for a moment and then rushing past. "Oh, Montag!"

"I'm going away," said Montag, stumbling to a chair. "I've been a fool."

Professor Faber stood at the door listening to the distant sirens wailing off like animals in the morning. "Someone's been busy."

"It worked."

"At least you were a fool about the right things." Faber shut the door, came back, and poured a drink for each of them. "I wondered what had happened to you."

"I was delayed." Montag patted his inside pocket. "The money's here." He took it out and laid it on the desk, then sat tiredly sipping his drink. "How do you feel?"

"This is the first night in many years I've fallen right to sleep," said Faber. "That must mean I'm doing the right thing. I think we can trust me now. Once, I didn't think so."

"People never trust themselves, but they never let others know. I suppose that's why we do rash things, expose ourselves in positions from which we don't dare retreat. Unconsciously, we fear we might give in, quit the fight, and so we do a foolish thing, like reading poetry to women." Montag laughed at himself. "So I guess I'm on the run: It'll be up to you to keep things moving."

"I'll do my damnedest." Faber sat down. "Tell me about it. What you did just now, I mean."

"I hid my remaining books in four firemen's homes. Then I telephoned an alarm. I figured I might be dead by morning, and I wanted to have done something before then."

"God, I'd like to've been there."

"Yes, the places burned very well."

"Where are you going now?"

"I don't know."

"Try the factory section, follow the old rail lines, look up some of the hobo camps. I didn't tell you

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this before—maybe I didn't quite trust you yet, I don't know—but they were in touch with me last year, wanting me to go underground with them."

"With *tramps?*"

"There are a lot of Harvard degrees on the tracks between here and Los Angeles. What else can they do? Most of them are wanted and hunted in cities. They survive. I don't think they have a plan for a revolution, though; I never heard them speak of it. They simply sit by their fires. Not a very lively group. But they might hide you now."

"I'll try. I'm heading for the river, I think, then the old factory district. I'll keep in touch with you."

"In Boston, then. I'm leaving on the three o'clock train tonight—or, rather, this morning. That's not long from now. There's a retired printer in Boston that I want to see with this money."

"I'll contact you there," said Montag. "And get books from you when I need them, to plant in firemen's houses across the country."

MONTAG drained his drink.

"Do you want to sleep here a while?" Faber asked.

"I'd better get going. I wouldn't want you held responsible."

"Let's check." Faber switched on the televisor. A voice was talking swiftly:

"—this evening. Montag has escaped, but we expect his arrest in 24 hours. Here's a bulletin. The Electric Dog is being transported here from Green Town—"

Montag and Faber glanced at each other.

"—You may recall the interviews recently on t-v concerning this incredible new invention, a machine so delicate in sense perception that it can follow trails much as bloodhounds did for centuries. But this machine, without fail, *always* finds its quarry!"

Montag put his empty glass down and he was cold.

"The machine is self-operating; weighs only forty pounds, is propelled on seven rubber wheels. The front is a nose, which in reality is a thousand noses, so sensitive that they can distinguish 10,000 food combinations, 5,000 flower smells, and remember identity index odors of 15,000 men without the bother of resetting."

Faber began to tremble. He looked at his house, at the door, the floor, the chair in which Montag sat. Montag interpreted this look. They both stared together at the invisible trail of his footprints leading to this house, the odor of his hand on the brass doorknobs, the smell of his body in the air and on this chair.

"The Electric Hound is now landing, by helicopter, at the burned Montag home. We take you there by t-v control!"

So they must have a game, thought Montag. In the midst of a

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time of war, they must play the game out.

There was the burned house, the crowd, and something with a sheet over it, Mr. Leahy—yes, Mr. Leahy—and out of the sky, fluttering, came the red helicopter, landing like a grotesque and menacing flower.

Montag watched the scene with a solid fascination, not wanting to move, ever. If he wished, he could linger here, in comfort, and follow the entire hunt on through its quick phases, down alleys, up streets, across empty running avenues, with the sky finally lightening with dawn, up other alleys to burned houses, and so on to this place here, this house, with Faber and himself seated at their leisure, smoking idly, drinking good wine, while the Electric Hound sniffed down the fatal paths, whirring and pausing with finality right outside that door there.

Then, if he wished, Montag could rise, walk to the door, keep one eye on the t-v screen, open the door, look out, look back, and see himself, dramatized, described, made over, standing there, limned in the bright television screen, from outside, a drama to be watched objectively, and he would catch himself, an instant before oblivion, being killed for the benefit of a million televiewers who had been wakened from their sleeps a few minutes ago by the frantic beep-beeping of their receivers to watch the big game, the big hunt, the Scoop!

"There it is," whispered Faber, hoarsely.

OUT of the helicopter glided something that was not a machine, not an animal, not dead, not alive, just gliding. It glowed with a green phosphorescence, and it was on a long leash. Behind it came a man, dressed lightly, with earphones on his shaven head.

"I can't stay here." Montag leaped up, his eyes still fixed to the scene. The Electric Hound shot forward to the smoking ruins, the man running after it. A coat was brought forward. Montag recognized it as his own, dropped in the yard during flight. The Electric Hound studied it for only a moment. There was a whirring and clicking of dials and meters.

"You can't escape." Faber mourned over it, turning away. "I've heard about that damned monster. No one has ever escaped."

"I'll try, anyway. I'm sorry about this, Professor."

"About me? About my house? Don't be. I'm the one to be sorry I didn't act years ago. Whatever I get out of this, I deserve. You run, now; perhaps I can delay them here somehow—"

"Wait a minute." Montag moved forward. "There's no use your being discovered. We can erase the trail here. First the chair. Get me a knife."

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Faber ran and fetched a knife. With it, Montag attacked the chair where he had sat. He cut the upholstery free, then shoved it, bit by bit, without touching the lid, into the wall incinerator. "Now," he said, "after I leave, rip up the carpet. It has my footprints on it. Cut it up, burn it, air the house. Rub the doorknobs with alcohol. After I go, turn your garden sprinkler on full. That'll wash away the sidewalk traces."

Faber shook his hand vigorously. "You don't know what this means. I'll do anything to help you in the future. Get in touch with me in Boston, then."

"One more thing. A suitcase, Get it, fill it with your dirty laundry, an old suit, the dirtier the better, denim pants maybe, a shirt, some old sneakers and socks."

Faber was gone and back in a minute. Montag sealed the full suitcase with scotch tape. "To keep the odor in," he said, breathlessly. He poured a liberal amount of cognac over the exterior of the case. "I don't want that Hound picking up two odors at once. Mind if I take this bottle of whisky? I'll need it later. When I get to the river, I'll change clothes."

"And identities; from Montag to Faber."

"Christ, I hope it works! If your clothes smell strong enough, which God knows they seem to, we might confuse the Hound, anyway."

"Good luck."

They shook hands again and glanced at the t-v. The Electric Hound was on its way, followed by mobile camera units, through alleys, across empty morning streets, silently, silently, sniffing the great night wind for Mr. Leonard Montag.

"Be seeing you!"

And Montag was out the door, running lightly, with the half empty case. Behind him, he saw and felt and heard the garden sprinkler system jump up, filling the dark air with synthetic rain to wash away the smell of Montag. Through the back window, the last thing he saw of Faber was the older man ripping up the carpet and cramming it in the wall incinerator.

Montag ran.

Behind him, in the night city, the Electric Hound followed.

HE STOPPED now and again, panting, across town, to watch through the dimly lighted windows of wakened houses. He peered in at silhouettes before television screens and there on the screens saw where the Electric Hound was, now at Elm Terrace, now at Lincoln Avenue, now at 34th, now up the alley toward Mr. Faber's, now *at* Faber's!

"No, no!" thought Montag. "Go on past! Don't turn in, don't!"

He held his breath.

The Electric Hound hesitated, then plunged on, leaving Faber's house behind. For a moment the t-v camera scanned Faber's home.

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The windows were dark. In the garden, the water sprinkled the cool air, softly.

THE Electric Hound raced ahead, down the alley.

"Good going, Professor." And Montag was gone, again, racing toward the distant river, stopping at other houses to see the game on the t-v sets, the long running game, and the Hound drawing near behind. "Only a mile away now!"

As he ran he had the Seashell at his ear and a voice ran with every step, with the beat of his heart and the sound of his shoes on gravel. "Watch for the pedestrian! Look for the pedestrian! Anyone on the sidewalks or in the street, walking or running, is suspect! Watch for the pedestrian!"

How simple in a city where no one walked. Look, look for the walking man, the man who proves his legs. Thank God for good dark alleys where men could run in peace. House lights flashed on all about. Montag saw faces peering streetward as he passed behind them, faces hid by curtains, pale, night-frightened faces, like odd animals peering from electric caves, faces with gray eyes and gray minds, and he plunged ahead, leaving them to their tasks, and in another minute was at the black, moving river.

He found what he was looking for after five minutes of running along the bank. It was a rowboat drawn and staked to the sand. He took possession.

The boat slid easily on the long silence of river and went away downstream from the city, bobbing and whispering, while Montag stripped in darkness down to the skin, and splashed his body, his arms, his legs, his face with raw liquor. Then he changed into Faber's old clothing and shoes. He tossed his own clothing into the river with the suitcase.

He sat watching the dark shore. There would be a delay while the pursuit rode the Electric Hound up and down stream to see where a man named Montag had stepped ashore.

Whether or not the smell of Faber would be strong enough, with the aid of the alcohol, was something else again. He pulled out a handkerchief he had saved over, doused it with the remainder of the liquor. He must hold this over his mouth when stepping ashore.

The particles of his breathing might remain in an electronically detectable invisible cloud for hours after he had passed on.

He couldn't wait any longer. He was below the town now, in a lonely place of weeds and old railway tracks. He rowed the boat toward shore, tied the handkerchief over his face, and leaped out as the boat touched briefly.

The current swept the boat away, turning slowly.

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"Farewell to Mr. Montag," he said. "Hello, Mr. Faber."

He went into the woods.

HE FOUND his way along railroad tracks that had not been used in years, crusted with brown rust and overgrown with weeds. He listened to his feet moving in the long grass. He paused now and then, checking behind to see if he was followed, but was not.

Firelight shone far ahead. "One of the camps," thought Montag. "One of the places where the hobo intellectuals cook their meals and talk!" It was unbelievable.

Half an hour later he came out of the weeds and the forest into the half light of the fire, for only a moment, then he hid back and waited, watching the group of seven men, holding their hands to the small blaze, murmuring. To their right, a quarter mile away, was the river. Up the stream a mile, and still apparent in the dark, was the city, and no sound except the voices and the fire crackling.

Montag waited ten minutes in the shadows. Finally a voice called: "All right, you can come out now."

He shrank back.

"It's okay," said the voice. "You're welcome here."

He let himself stand forth and then he walked tiredly toward the fire, peering at the men and their dirty clothing.

"We're not very elegant," said the man who seemed to be the leader of the little group. "Sit down. Have some coffee."

He watched the dark steaming mixture poured into a collapsible cup which was handed him straight off. He sipped it gingerly. He felt the scald on his lips. The men were watching him. Their faces were unshaved but their beards were much too neat, and their hands were clean. They had stood up, as if to welcome a guest, and now they sat down again. Montag sipped. "Thanks," he said.

The leader said, "My name is Granger, as good a name as any. You don't have to tell us your name at all." He remembered something. "Here, before you finish the coffee, better take this." He held out a small bottle of colorless fluid.

"What is it?"

"Drink it. Whoever you are, you wouldn't be here unless you were in trouble. Either that, or you're a Government spy, in which case we are only a bunch of men traveling nowhere and hurting no one. In any event, whoever you are, an hour after you've drunk this fluid, you'll be someone else. It does something to the perspiratory system—changes the sweat content. If you want to stay here you'll have to drink it, otherwise you'll have to move on. If there's a Hound after you, you'd be bad company."

"I think I took care of the Hound," said Montag, and drank the tasteless stuff. The fluid stung his throat. He was sick for a mo-

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ment; there was a blackness in his eyes, and a roaring in his head. Then it passed.

"THAT'S better, Mr. Montag," said Granger, and snorted at his social error. "I beg your pardon—" He poked his thumb at a small portable t-v beyond the fire. "We've been watching. They videoed a picture of you, not a very good resemblance. We hoped you'd head this way."

"It's been quite a chase."

"Yes." Granger snapped the t-v on. It was no bigger than a handbag, weighing some seven pounds, mostly screen. A voice from the set cried:

"The chase is now veering south along the river. On the eastern shore the police helicopters are converging on Avenue 87 and Elm Grove Park."

"You're safe," said Granger. "They're faking. You threw them off at the river, but they can't admit it. Must be a million people watching that bunch of scoundrels hound after you. They'll catch you in five minutes."

"But if they're ten miles away, how can they . . .?"

"Watch."

He made the t-v picture brighter.

"Up that street there, somewhere, right now, out for an early morning walk. A rarity, an odd one. Don't think the police don't know the habits of queer ducks like that, men who walk early in the morning just for the hell of it. Anyway, up that street the police know that every morning a certain man walks alone, for the air, to smoke. Call him Billings or Brown or Baumgartner, but the search is getting nearer to him every minute. See?"

In the video screen, a man turned a corner. The Electric Hound rushed forward, screeching. The police converged upon the man.

The t-v voice cried, "There's Montag now! The search is over!"

The innocent man stood watching the crowd come on. In his hand was a cigaret, half smoked. He looked at the Hound and his jaw dropped and he started to say something when a godlike voice boomed, "All right, Montag, don't move! We've got you, Montag!"

By the small fire, with seven other men, Mr. Montag sat, ten miles removed, the light of the video screen on his face.

"Don't run, Montag!"

The man turned, bewildered. The crowd roared. The Hound leaped up.

"The poor son of a bitch," said Granger, bitterly.

A dozen shots rattled out. The man crumpled.

"Montag is dead, the search is over, a criminal is given his due," said the announcer.

The camera trucked forward. Just before it showed the dead man's face, however, the screen went black.

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"We now switch you to the Sky Room of the Hotel Lux in San Francisco for a half hour of dawn dance music by—"

GRANGER turned it off. "They didn't show the man's face, naturally. Better if everyone thinks it's Montag."

Montag said nothing, but simply looked at the blank screen. He could not move or speak.

Granger put out his hand. "Welcome back from the dead, Mr. Montag." Montag took the hand, numbly. The man said, "My real name is Clement, former occupant of the T. S. Eliot Chair at Cambridge. That was before it became an Electrical Engineering School. This gentleman here is Dr. Simmons from U.C.L.A."

"I don't belong here," said Montag, at last, slowly. "I've been an idiot, all the way down the line, bungled and messed and tripped myself up."

"Anger makes idiots of us all, I'm afraid. You can only be angry so long, then you explode and do the wrong things. It can't be helped now."

"I shouldn't have come here. It might endanger you."

"We're used to that. We all make mistakes, or we wouldn't be here ourselves. When we were separate individuals, all we had was rage. I struck a fireman in the face, once. He'd come to burn my library back about forty years ago. I had to run. I've been running ever since. And Simmons here . . ."

"I quoted Donne in the midst of a genetics class one afternoon. For no reason at all. Just started quoting Donne. You see? Fools, all of us."

They glanced at the fire, self-consciously.

"So you want to join us, Mr. Montag?"

"Yes."

"What have you to offer?"

"Nothing. I thought I had the Book of Job, but I haven't even got that now."

"The Book of Job would do very well. Where was it?"

"Here." Montag touched his head.

"Ah," said Granger-Clement. He smiled and nodded.

"What's wrong? Isn't that all right?" said Montag.

"Better than all right—perfect! Mr. Montag, you have hit upon the secret of, if you want to give it a term, our organization. Living books, Mr. Montag, living books. Inside the old skull where no one can see." He turned to Simmons. "Do we have a Book of Job?"

"Only one. A man named Harris in Youngstown."

"Mr. Montag." The man grasped Montag's shoulder firmly. "Walk slowly, be careful, take your health seriously. If anything should happen to Harris, you are the Book of Job. Do you see how important you are?"

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"But I've forgotten it!"

"Nonsense, nothing is ever forgotten. Mislaid, perhaps, but not forgotten. We have ways, several new methods of hypnosis, to shake down the clinkers there. You'll remember, don't fear."

"I've been *trying* to remember."

"Don't try. Relax. It'll come when we need it. Some people are quick studies but don't know it. Some of God's simplest creatures have the ability called eidetic or photographic memory, the ability to memorize entire pages of print at a glance. It has nothing to do with I.Q. No offense, Montag. It varies. Would you like, one day, to read Plato's Republic?"

"Of course."

Granger nodded to a man who had been sitting to one side.

"Mr. Plato, if you please."

THE man began to talk. He looked at Montag idly, his hands filling a corncob pipe, unaware of the words tumbling from his lips. He talked for two minutes without a pause or stumble.

Granger made the smallest move of his fingers. The man cut off. "Perfect word-for-word memory, every word important, every word Plato's," said Granger.

"And," said the man who was Plato, "I don't understand a damned word of it. I just say it. It's up to you to understand."

"Don't you understand *any* of it?" asked Montag.

"None of it. But I can't get it out. Once it's in, it's like solidified glue in a bottle, there for good. Mr. Granger says it's important. That's good enough for me."

"We're old friends," said Granger. "We hadn't seen each other since we were boys. We met a few years ago on that track, somewhere between here and Seattle, walking, me running away from firemen, he running from cities."

"Never liked cities," said the one who was Plato. "Always felt that cities owned men, that was all, and used men to keep themselves going, to keep machines oiled and dusted. So I got out. And then I met Granger and he found out that I had this eidetic memory, as he calls it, and he gave me a book to read and then we burned the book ourselves so we wouldn't be caught with it. And now I'm Plato; that's what I am."

"He is also Socrates."

The man nodded.

"And Schopenhauer."

Another nod.

"And John Dewey."

"All that in one bottle. You wouldn't think there was room. But I can open my head like a concertina and play it. There's plenty of room if you don't try to think about what you've memorized. It's when you start thinking that all of a sudden it's crowded. I don't think about anything except eating, sleeping, and traveling. I let you people do the thinking when you hear what

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I recite. Oh, there's *plenty* of room, believe me."

"So here we are, Mr. Montag. Mr. Simmons is really Mr. John Donne and Mr. Charles Darwin and Mr. Aristophanes. These other gentlemen are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And *I* am Ruth."

Everyone laughed quietly.

"You see, we are not without humor in this melancholy age. I'm also bits and pieces, Mr. Montag, snatches of Byron and Shelley and Shaw and Washington Irving and Shakespeare. I'm one of those kaleidoscopes. Hold me up to the sun, give a shake, watch the patterns. And you are Mr. Job, and in half an hour or less, a war will begin. While those people in that anthill across the river have been busy chasing Montag, as if he were the cause of all their nervous anxiety and frustration, the war has been getting under way. By this time tomorrow the world will belong to the little green towns and the rusted railroad tracks and the men walking on them; that's us. The cities will be soot and baking powder."

THE t-v rang a bell. Granger switched it on.

"Final negotiations are arranged for a conference today with the enemy government—"

Granger snapped it off.

"Well, what do you think, Montag?"

"I think I was pretty blind and ferocious trying to go at it the way I did, planting books and calling firemen."

"You did what you thought you had to do. But our way is simpler and better and the thing we wish to do is keep the knowledge intact and safe and not to excite or anger anyone; for then, if we are destroyed, the knowledge is most certainly dead. We are model citizens in our own special way—we walk the tracks, we lie in the hills at night, we bother no one, and the city people let us be. We're stopped and searched for books, occasionally, but we have none, and our faces have been changed by plastic surgery, as have our fingerprints. So we wait quietly for the day when the machines are dented junk and then we hope to walk by and say, 'Here we are,' to those who survive this war, and we'll say, 'Have you come to your senses now? Perhaps a few books will do you some good.'"

"But will they listen to you?"

"Perhaps not. Then we'll have to wait some more. Maybe a few hundred years. Maybe they'll never listen; we can't *make* them. So we'll pass the books on to our children, in their minds, and let them wait, in turn, on other people. *Some* day someone will need us. This can't last forever."

"How many of you are there?"

"Thousands on the road, on the rails, bums on the outside, libraries on the inside. It wasn't really

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planned; it grew. Each man had a book he wanted to remember and did. Then we discovered each other and over twenty years or so got a loose network together and made a plan. The important thing we had to learn was that we were not important, we were not to be pedants, we were not to feel superior, we were nothing more than covers for books, of no individual significance whatever. Some of us live in small towns—chapter one of Walden in Nantucket, chapter two in Reading, chapter three in Waukesha, each according to his ability. Some can learn a few lines, some a lot."

"The books are safe then."

"Couldn't be safer. Why, there's one village in North Carolina, some 200 people, no bomb'll ever touch their town, which is the complete Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. You could pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, a page to a person. People who wouldn't dream of being seen with a book gladly memorized a page. You can't be caught with that. And when the war's over and we've time and need, the books can be written again. The people will be called in one by one to recite what they know and it'll be in print again until another Dark Age, when maybe we'll have to do the whole damned thing over again, man being the fool he is."

"What do we do tonight?" asked Montag.

"Just wait, that's all."

MONTAG looked at the men's faces, old, all of them, in the firelight, and certainly tired. Perhaps he was looking for a brightness, a resolve, a triumph over tomorrow that wasn't really there. Perhaps he expected these men to be proud with the knowledge they carried, to glow with the wisdom as lanterns glow with the fire they contain.

But all the light came from the campfire here, and these men seemed no different than any other man who has run a long run, searched a long search, seen precious things destroyed, seen old friends die, and now, very late in time, were gathered together to watch the machines die, or hope they might die, even while cherishing a last paradoxical love for those very machines which could spin out a material with happiness in the warp and terror in the woof, so interblended that a man might go insane trying to tell the design to himself, and his place in it.

They weren't at all certain that what they carried in their heads might make every future dawn dawn brighter. They were sure of nothing save that the books were on file behind their solemn eyes and that if man put his mind to them properly, something of dignity and happiness might be regained.

Montag looked from one face to another.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," said someone.

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A soft laughter moved among them.

Montag turned to look at the city across the river.

"My wife's in that city now," he said.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Look," said Simmons.

Montag glanced up.

The bombardment was finished and over, even while the seeds were in the windy sky. The bombs were there, the jet-planes were there, for the merest trifle of an instant, like grain thrown across the heavens by a great hand, and the bombs drifted with a dreadful slowness down upon the morning city where all of the people looked up at their destiny coming upon them like the lid of a dream shutting tight and become an instant later a red and powdery nightmare.

The bombardment to all military purposes was finished. Once the planes had sighted their target, alerted their bombardier at five thousand miles an hour, as quick as the whisper of a knife through the sky, the war was finished. Once the trigger was pulled, once the bombs took flight, it was over.

Now, a full three seconds, all of the time in history, before the bombs struck, the enemy ships themselves were gone, half around the visible world, it seemed, like bullets in which an island savage might not believe because they were unseen, yet the heart is struck suddenly, the body falls into separate divisions, the blood is astounded to be free on the air, and the brain gives up all its precious memories and, still puzzled, dies.

THIS war was not to be believed. It was merely a gesture. It was the flirt of a great metal hand over the city and a voice saying, "Disintegrate. Leave no stone upon another. Perish. Die."

Montag held the bombs in the sky for a precious moment, with his mind and his hands. "Run!" he cried to Faber. To Clarisse, "Run!" To Mildred, "Get out, get out of there!" But Clarisse, he remembered, was dead. And Faber *was* out; there, in the deep valleys of the country, went the dawn train on its way from one desolation to another. Though the desolation had not yet arrived, was still in the air, it was as certain as man could make it. Before the train had gone another fifty yards on the track, its destination would be meaningless, its point of departure made from a metropolis into a junkyard.

And Mildred!

"Get out, run!" he thought.

He could see Mildred in that metropolis now, in the half second remaining, as the bombs were perhaps three inches, three small inches shy of her hotel building. He could see her leaning into the t-v set as if all of the hunger of looking would find the secret of her sleepless unease there. Mildred, leaning anxiously, nervously, into that tubular

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world as into a crystal ball to find happiness.

The first bomb struck.

"Mildred!"

Perhaps the television station went first into oblivion.

Montag saw the screen go dark in Mildred's face, and heard her screaming, because in the next millionth part of time left, she would see her own face reflected there, hungry and alone, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it would be such a wildly empty face that she would at last recognize it, and stare at the ceiling almost with welcome as it and the entire structure of the hotel blasted down upon her, carrying her with a million pounds of brick, metal and people down into the cellar, there to dispose of them in its unreasonable way.

"I remember now," thought Montag, "where we first met. It was in Chicago. Yes, now I remember."

Montag found himself on his face. The concussion had knocked the air across the river, turned the men down like dominoes in a line, blown out the fire like a last candle, and caused the trees to mourn with a great voice of wind passing away south.

Montag lay with his face toward the city. Now it, instead of the bombs, was in the air. They had

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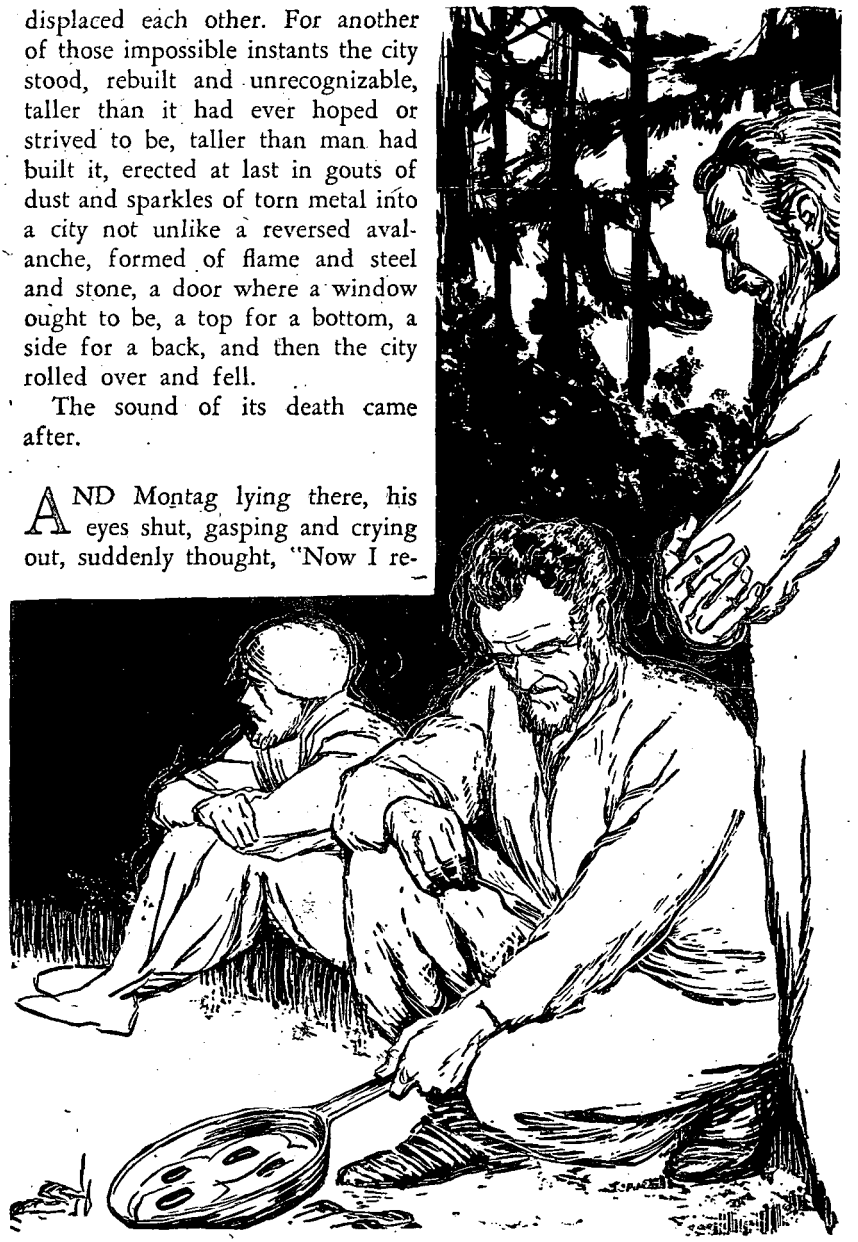
displaced each other. For another of those impossible instants the city stood, rebuilt and unrecognizable, taller than it had ever hoped or strived to be, taller than man had built it, erected at last in gouts of dust and sparkles of torn metal into a city not unlike a reversed avalanche, formed of flame and steel and stone, a door where a window ought to be, a top for a bottom, a side for a back, and then the city rolled over and fell.

The sound of its death came after.

AND Montag lying there, his eyes shut, gasping and crying out, suddenly thought, "Now I re-



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member another thing. Now I remember the Book of Job." He said it over to himself, lying tight to the earth; he said the words of it many times and they were perfect without trying. "Now I remember the book of Job. Now I *do* remember . . ."

"There," said a voice, Granger's voice.

The men lay like gasping fish on the grass.

They did not get up for a long time, but held to the earth as children hold to a familiar thing, no matter how cold or dead, no matter what has happened or will happen. Their fingers were clawed into the soil, and they were all shouting to keep their ears in balance and open, Montag shouting with them, a protest against the wind that swept them, shaking their hair, tearing at their lips, making their noses bleed.

Montag watched the blood drip into the earth with such an absorption that the city was effortlessly forgotten.

The wind died.

The city was flat, as if one had taken a heaping tablespoon of flour and passed a finger over it, smoothing it to an even level.

The men said nothing. They lay a while like people on the dawn edge of sleep, not yet ready to arise and begin the day's obligations, its fires and foods, its thousand details of putting foot after foot, hand after hand, its deliveries and functions and minute obsessions. They lay blinking their stunned eyelids. You could hear them breathing fast, then slower, then with the slowness of normality.

Montag sat up. He did not move any farther, however. The other men did likewise. The sun was touching the black horizon with a faint red tip. The air was cool and sweet and smelled of rain. In a few minutes it would smell of dust and pulverized iron, but now it was sweet.

And across the world, thought Montag, the cities of the other nations are dead, too, almost in the same instant.

Silently, the leader of the small group, Granger, arose, felt of his arms and legs, touched his face to see if everything was in its place, then shuffled over to the blown-out fire and bent over it. Montag watched.

Everyone watched.

Striking a match, Granger touched it to a piece of paper and shoved this under a bit of kindling, and shoved together bits of straw and dry wood, and after a while, drawing the men slowly, awkwardly to it by its glow, the fire licked up, coloring their faces pink and yellow, while the sun rose slowly to color their backs.

THERE was no sound except the low and secret talk of men at morning, and the talk was no more than this:

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"How many strips?"

"Two each."

"Good enough."

The bacon was counted out on a wax paper. The frying pan was set to the fire and the bacon laid in it. After a moment it began to flutter and dance in the pan and the sputter of it filled the morning air with its aroma. Eggs were cracked in upon the bacon and the men watched this ritual, for the leader was a participant, as were they, in a religion of early rising, a thing man had done for many centuries, thought Montag, a thing man had done over and over again, and Montag felt at ease among them, as if during the long night the walls of a great prison had vaporized around them and they were on the land again and only the birds sang on or off as they pleased, with no schedule, and with no nagging human insistence.

"Here," said Granger, dishing out the bacon and eggs to each from the hot pan. They each held out the scratched tin plates that had been passed around.

Then, without looking up, breaking more eggs into the pan for himself, Granger slowly and with a concern both for what he said, recalling it, rounding it, and for making the food also, began to recite snatches and rhythms, even while the day brightened all about as if a pink lamp had been given more wick, and Montag listened and they all looked at the tin plates in their hands, waiting a moment for the eggs to cool, while the leader started the routine, and others took it up, here or there, round about.

WHEN it was Montag's turn, he spoke, too:

"To everything there is a season,
And a time to every purpose under the heaven . . .
A time to be born, and a time to die . . .
A time to kill, and a time to heal . . ."

The forks moved in the pink light. Now each of the men remembered a separate and different thing, a bit of poetry, a line from a play, an old song. And they spoke these little bits and pieces in the early morning air:

"Man that is born of a woman
Is of few days and full of trouble . . ."

A wind blew in the trees.

"To be or not to be, that is the question . . ."

The sun was fully up.

"Oh, do you remember, Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt . . .?"

Montag felt fine.

—RAY BRADBURY

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. . . and it

By LESTER DEL REY

NO, YOU'RE wrong. I'm not your father's ghost, even if I do look a bit like him. But it's a longish story, and you might as well let me in. You will, you know, so why quibble about it? At least, you always have . . . or do . . . or will. I don't know, verbs get all mixed up. We don't have the right attitude toward tenses for a situation like this.

Anyhow, you'll let me in. I did, so you will.

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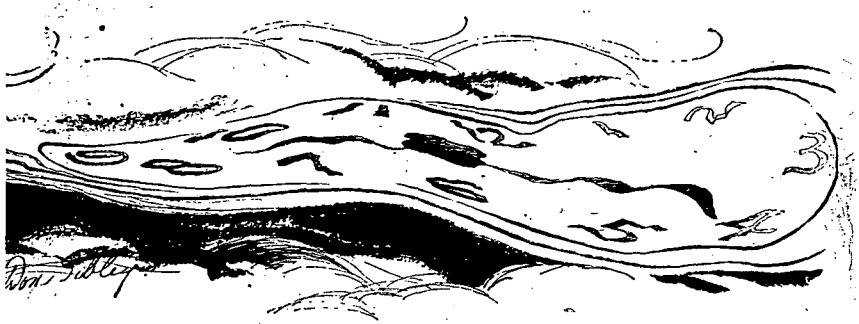
comes out here



Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

There is one fact no sane man can quarrel with ... everything has a beginning and an end. But some men aren't sane; thus it isn't always so!

Thanks. You think you're crazy, of course, but you'll find out you aren't. It's just that things are a bit confused. And don't look at the machine out there too long—until you get used to it, you'll find it's hard on the eyes, trying to follow where the vanes go. You'll get used to it, of course, but it will take about thirty years.

You're wondering whether to give me a drink, as I remember it. Why not? And naturally, since we have the same tastes, you can make the same for me as you're having. Of course we have the same tastes—we're the same person. I'm you thirty years from now, or you're me. I remember just how you feel; I felt the same way when he—that is, of course, I or we—came back to tell me about it, thirty years ago.

Here, have one of these. You'll get to like them in a couple more years. And you can look at the revenue stamp date, if you still doubt my story. You'll believe it eventually, though, so it doesn't matter.

Right now, you're shocked. It's a real wrench when a man meets himself for the first time. Some kind of telepathy seems to work

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between two of the same people. You *sense* things. So I'll simply go ahead talking for half an hour or so, until you get over it. After that you'll come along with me. You know, I could try to change things around by telling what happened to me; but he—I—told me what I was going to do, so I might as well do the same. I probably couldn't help telling you the same thing in the same words, even if I tried—and I don't intend to try. I've gotten past that stage in worrying about all this.

So let's begin when you get up in half an hour and come out with me. You'll take a closer look at the machine, then. Yes, it'll be pretty obvious it must be a time machine. You'll sense that, too. You've seen it, just a small little cage with two seats, a luggage compartment, and a few buttons on a dash. You'll be puzzling over what I'll tell you, and you'll be getting used to the idea that you are the man who makes atomic power practical. Jerome Boell, just a plain engineer, the man who put atomic power in every home. You won't exactly believe it, but you'll want to go along.

I'LL BE tired of talking by then, and in a hurry to get going. So I cut off your questions, and get you inside. I snap on a green button, and everything seems to cut off around us. You can see a sort of foggy nothing surrounding the cockpit; it is probably the field that prevents passage through time from affecting us. The luggage section isn't protected, though.

You start to say something, but by then I'm pressing a black button, and everything outside will disappear. You look for your house, but it isn't there. There is exactly nothing there—in fact, there is no *there*. You are completely outside of time and space, as best you can guess how things are.

You can't feel any motion, of course. You try to reach a hand out through the field into the nothing around you and your hand goes out, all right, but nothing happens. Where the screen ends, your hand just turns over and pokes back at you. Doesn't hurt, and when you pull your arm back, you're still sound and uninjured. But it looks frightening and you don't try it again.

Then it comes to you slowly that you're actually traveling in time. You turn to me, getting used to the idea. "So this is the fourth dimension?" you ask.

Then you feel silly, because you'll remember that I said you'd ask that. Well, I asked it after I was told, then I came back and told it to you, and I still can't help answering when you speak.

"Not exactly," I try to explain. "Maybe it's no dimension—or it might be the fifth; if you're going to skip over the so-called fourth without traveling along it, you'd

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need a fifth. Don't ask me. I didn't invent the machine and I don't understand it."

"But . . ."

I let it go, and so do you. If you don't, a good way of going crazy. You'll see later why I couldn't have invented the machine. Of course, there may have been a start for all this once. There may have been a time when you did invent the machine—the atomic motor first, then the time-machine. And when you closed the loop by going back and saving yourself the trouble, it got all tangled up. I figured out once that such a universe would need some seven or eight time and space dimensions. It's simpler just to figure that this is the way time got bent back on itself. Maybe there is no machine, and it's just easier for us to imagine it. When you spend thirty years thinking about it, as I did—and you will—you get further and further from an answer.

Anyhow, you sit there, watching nothing all around you, and no time, apparently, though there is a time effect back in the luggage space. You look at your watch and it's still running. That means you either carry a small time field with you, or you are catching a small increment of time from the main field. I don't know, and you won't think about that then, either.

I'M SMOKING, and so are you, and the air in the machine is getting a bit stale. You suddenly realize that everything in the machine is wide open, yet you haven't seen any effects of air loss.

"Where are we getting our air?" you ask. "Or why don't we lose it?"

"No place for it to go," I explain. There isn't. Out there is neither time nor space, apparently. How could the air leak out? You still feel gravity, but I can't explain that, either. Maybe the machine has a gravity field built in, or maybe the time that makes your watch run is responsible for gravity. In spite of Einstein, you have always had the idea that time is an effect of gravity, and I sort of agree, still.

Then the machine stops—at least, the field around us cuts off. You feel a dankish sort of air replace the stale air, and you breathe easier, though we're in complete darkness, except for the weak light in the machine, which always burns, and a few feet of rough dirty cement floor around. You take another cigaret from me and you get out of the machine, just as I do.

I've got a bundle of clothes and I start changing. It's a sort of simple, short-limbed, one-piece affair I put on, but it feels comfortable.

"I'm staying here," I tell you. "This is like the things they wear in this century, as near as I can remember it, and I should be able to pass fairly well. I've had all my fortune—the one you make on that atomic generator—invested in such a way I can get it on using some

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identification I've got with me, so I'll do all right. I know they still use some kind of money, you'll see evidence of that. And it's a pretty easygoing civilization, from what I could see. We'll go up and I'll leave you. I like the looks of things here, so I won't be coming back with you."

You nod, remembering I've told you about it. "What century is this, anyway?"

I'd told you that, too, but you've forgotten. "As near as I can guess, it's about 2150. He told me, just as I'm telling you, that it's an interstellar civilization."

You take another cigaret from me, and follow me. I've got a small flashlight and we grope through a pile of rubbish, out into a corridor. This is a sub-sub-sub-basement. We have to walk up a flight of stairs, and there is an elevator waiting, fortunately with the door open.

"What about the time machine?" you ask.

"Since nobody ever stole it, it's safe."

WE GET in the elevator, and I say "first" to it. It gives out a soughing noise and the basement openings begin to click by us. There's no feeling of acceleration—some kind of false gravity they use in the future. Then the door opens, and the elevator says "first" back at us.

It's obviously a service elevator and we're in a dim corridor, with nobody around. I grab your hand and shake it. "You go that way. Don't worry about getting lost; you never did, so you can't. Find the museum, grab the motor, and get out. And good luck to you."

You act as if you're dreaming, though you can't believe it's a dream. You nod at me and I move out into the main corridor. A second later, you see me going by, mixed into a crowd that is loafing along toward a restaurant, or something like it, that is just opening. I'm asking questions of a man, who points, and I turn and move off.

You come out of the side corridor and go down a hall, away from the restaurant. There are quiet little signs along the hall. You look at them, realizing for the first time that things have changed.

Steij:neri, Faunten, Z:rgat Dispenseri. The signs are very quiet and dignified. Some of them can be decoded to stationery shops, fountains, and the like. What a zergot is, you don't know. You stop at a sign that announces: *Trav:l Biwrón—F:rst-Clas Twrz—Marz, Viin*s, and x: Troujːn Planets. Spej:l reits tu aol s*nz wixin 60 lyt iirz!* But there is only a single picture of a dull-looking metal sphere, with passengers moving up a ramp, and the office is closed. You begin to get the hang of the spelling they use, though.

Now there are people around you, but nobody pays much attention to you. Why should they? You

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wouldn't care if you saw a man in a leopard-skin suit; you'd figure it was some part in a play and let it go. Well, people don't change much.

You get up your courage and go up to a boy selling something that might be papers on tapes.

"Where can I find the Museum of Science?"

"Downayer rien turn lefa the sign. Stoo bloss," he tells you. Around you, you hear some pretty normal English, but there are others using stuff as garbled as his. The educated and uneducated? I don't know.

You go right until you find a big sign built into the rubbery surface of the walk: *Miuzi:m *v Syens.* There's an arrow pointing and you turn left. Ahead of you, two blocks on, you can see a pink building, with faint aqua trimming, bigger than most of the others. They are building lower than they used to, apparently. Twenty floors up seems about the maximum. You head for it, and find the sidewalk is marked with the information that it is the museum.

YOU go up the steps, but you see that it seems to be closed. You hesitate for a moment, then. You're beginning to think the whole affair is complete nonsense, and you should get back to the time machine and go home. But then a guard comes to the gate. Except for the short legs in his suit and the friendly grin on his face, he looks like any other guard.

What's more, he speaks pretty clearly. Everyone says things in a sort of drawl, with softer vowels and slurred consonants, but it's rather pleasant.

"Help you, sir? Oh, of course. You must be playing in 'Atoms and Axioms.' The museum's closed, but I'll be glad to let you study whatever you need for realism in your role. Nice show. I saw it twice."

"Thanks," you mutter, wondering what kind of civilization can produce guards as polite as that. "I—I'm told I should investigate your display of atomic generators."

He beams at that. "Of course." The gate is swung to behind you, but obviously he isn't locking it. In fact, there doesn't seem to be a lock. "Must be a new part. You go down that corridor, up one flight of stairs and left. Finest display in all the known worlds. We've got the original of the first thirteen models. Professor Jonas was using them to check his latest theory of how they work. Too bad he could not explain the principle, either. Someone will, some day, though. Lord, the genius of that twentieth century inventor! It's quite a hobby with me, sir. I've read everything I could get on the period. Oh—congratulations on your pronunciation. Sounds just like some of our oldest tapes."

You get away from him, finally, after some polite thanks. The

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building seems deserted and you wander up the stairs. There's a room on your right filled with something that proclaims itself the first truly plastic diamond former, and you go up to it. As you come near, it goes through a crazy wiggle inside, stops turning out a continual row of what seem to be bearings, and slips something the size of a penny toward you.

"Souvenir," it announces in a well-modulated voice. "This is a typical gem of the twentieth century, properly cut to 58 facets, known technically as a Jaegger diamond, and approximately twenty carats in size. You can have it made into a ring on the third floor during morning hours for one-tenth credit. If you have more than one child, press the red button for the number of stones you desire."

You put it in your pocket, gulping a little, and get back to the corridor. You turn left and go past a big room in which models of spaceships—from the original thing that looks like a V-2, and is labeled first Lunar rocket, to a ten-foot globe, complete with miniature manikins—are sailing about in some kind of orbits. Then there is one labeled *Wep:nz,* filled with everything from a crossbow to a tiny rod four inches long and half the thickness of a pencil, marked *Fynal Hand Arm.* Beyond is the end of the corridor, and a big place that bears a sign, *Mad:lz *v Atamic Pau:r Sorsez.*

BY THAT time, you're almost convinced. And you've been doing a lot of thinking about what you can do. The story I'm telling has been sinking in, but you aren't completely willing to accept it.

You notice that the models are all mounted on tables and that they're a lot smaller than you thought. They seem to be in chronological order, and the latest one, marked *2147—Rincs Dyn*pat:,* is about the size of a desk telephone. The earlier ones are larger, of course, clumsier, but with variations, probably depending on the power output. A big sign on the ceiling gives a lot of dope on atomic generators, explaining that this is the first invention which leaped full blown into basically final form.

You study it, but it mentions casually the inventor, without giving his name. Either they don't know it, or they take it for granted that everyone does, which seems more probable. They call attention to the fact that they have the original model of the first atomic generator built, complete with design drawings, original manuscript on operation, and full patent application.

They state that it has all major refinements, operating on any fuel, producing electricity at any desired voltage up to five million, any chosen cyclic rate from direct current to one thousand megacycles, and any amperage up to one thousand, its maximum power output being fifty kilowatts, limited by

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the current-carrying capacity of the outputs. They also mention that the operating principle is still being investigated, and that only such refinements as better alloys and the addition of magnetric and nucleatric current outlets have been added since the original.

So you go to the end and look over the thing. It's simply a square box with a huge plug on each side, and a set of vernier controls on top, plus a little hole marked, in old-style spelling, *Drop BBs or wire here*. Apparently that's the way it's fueled. It's about one foot on each side.

"Nice," the guard says over your shoulder. "It finally wore out one of the cathogrids and we had to replace that, but otherwise it's exactly as the great inventor made it. And it still operates as well as ever. Like to have me tell you about it?"

"Not particularly," you begin, and then realize bad manners might be conspicuous here. While you're searching for an answer, the guard pulls something out of his pocket and stares at it.

"Fine, fine. The mayor of Altasecarba—Centaurian, you know—is arriving, but I'll be back in about ten minutes. He wants to examine some of the weapons for a monograph on Centaurian primitives compared to nineteenth century man. You'll pardon me?"

You pardon him pretty eagerly and he wanders off happily. You go up to the head of the line, to that Rinks Dynapattuh, or whatever it transliterates to. That's small and you can carry it. But the darned thing is absolutely fixed. You can't see any bolts, but you can't budge it, either.

YOU work down the line. It'd be foolish to take the early model if you can get one with built-in magnetic current terminals —Ehrenhaft or some other principle?—and nuclear binding-force energy terminals. But they're all held down by the same whatchamaycallem effect.

And, finally, you're right back beside the original first model. It's probably bolted down, too, but you try it tentatively and you find it moves. There's a little sign under it, indicating you shouldn't touch it, since the gravostatic plate is being renewed.

Well, you won't be able to change the time cycle by doing anything I haven't told you, but a working model such as that is a handy thing. You lift it; it only weighs about fifty pounds! Naturally, it can be carried.

You expect a warning bell, but nothing happens. As a matter of fact, if you'd stop drinking so much of that scotch and staring at the time machine out there now, you'd hear what I'm saying and know what will happen to you. But of course, just as I did, you're going to miss a lot of what I say from now on, and have to find out for

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yourself. But maybe some of it helps. I've tried to remember how much I remembered, after he told me, but I can't be sure. So I'll keep on talking. I probably can't help it, anyhow. Pre-set, you might say.

Well, you stagger down the corridor, looking out for the guard, but all seems clear. Then you hear his voice from the weapons room. You bend down and try to scurry past, but you know you're in full view. Nothing happens, though.

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You stumble down the stairs, feeling all the futuristic rays in the world on your back, and still nothing happens. Ahead of you, the gate is closed. You reach it and it opens obligingly by itself. You breathe a quick sigh of relief and start out onto the street.

Then there's a yell behind you. You don't wait. You put one leg in front of the other and you begin racing down the walk, ducking past people, who stare at you with expressions you haven't time to see. There's another yell behind you.

Something goes over your head and drops on the sidewalk just in front of your feet, with a sudden ringing sound. You don't wait to find out about that, either. Somebody reaches out a hand to catch you and you dart past.

The street is pretty clear now and you jolt along, with your arms seeming to come out of the sockets, and that atomic generator getting heavier at every step.

Out of nowhere, something in a blue uniform about six feet tall and on the beefy side appears—and the badge hasn't changed much. The cop catches your arm and you know you're not going to get away, so you stop.

"You can't exert yourself that hard in this heat, fellow," the cop says. "There are laws against that, without a yellow sticker. Here, let me grab you a taxi."

REACTION sets in a bit and your knees begin to buckle, but you shake your head and come up for air.

"I—I left my money home," you begin.

The cop nods. "Oh, that explains it. Fine, I won't have to give you an appearance schedule. But you should have come to me." He reaches out and taps a pedestrian lightly on the shoulder. "Sir, an emergency request. Would you help this gentleman?"

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The pedestrian grins, looks at his watch, and nods. "How far?"

You did notice the name of the building from which you came and you mutter it. The stranger nods again, reaches out and picks up the other side of the generator, blowing a little whistle the cop hands him. Pedestrians begin to move aside, and you and the stranger jog down the street at a trot, with a nice clear path, while the cop stands beaming at you both.

That way, it isn't so bad. And you begin to see why I decided I might like to stay in the future. But all the same, the organized cooperation here doesn't look too good. The guard can get the same and be there before you.

And he is. He stands just inside the door of the building as you reach it. The stranger lifts an eyebrow and goes off at once when you nod at him, not waiting for thanks. And the guard comes up, holding some dinkus in his hand, about the size of a big folding camera and not too dissimilar in other ways. He snaps it open and you get set to duck.

"You forgot the prints, monograph, and patent applications," he says. "They go with the generator —we don't like to have them separated. A good thing I knew the production office of 'Atoms and Axioms' was in this building. Just let us know when you're finished with the model and we'll pick it up."

You swallow several sets of tonsils you had [illegible] years before, and take the bundle of papers he hands you out of the little case. He pumps you for some more information, which you give him at random. It seems to satisfy your amiable guard friend. He finally smiles in satisfaction and heads back to the museum.

You still don't believe it, but you pick up the atomic generator and the information sheets, and you head down toward the service elevator. There is no button on it. In fact, there's no door there.

You start looking for other doors or corridors, but you know this is right. The signs along the halls are the same as they were.

THEN there's a sort of cough and something dilates in the wall. It forms a perfect door and the elevator stands there waiting. You get in, gulping out something about going all the way down, and then wonder how a machine geared for voice operation can make anything of that. What the deuce would that lowest basement be called? But the elevator has closed and is moving downward in a hurry. It coughs again and you're at the original level. You get out—and realize you don't have a light.

You'll never know what you stumbled over, but, somehow, you move back in the direction of the time machine, bumping against boxes, staggering here and there,

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and trying to find the right place by sheer feel. Then a shred of dim light appears; it's the weak light in the time machine.

You've located it.

You put the atomic generator in the luggage space, throw the papers down beside it, and climb into the cockpit, sweating and mumbling. You reach forward toward the green button and hesitate. There's a red one beside it and you finally decide on that.

Suddenly, there's a confused yell from the direction of the elevator and a beam of light strikes against your eyes, with a shout punctuating it. Your finger touches the red button.

You'll never know what the shouting was about—whether they finally doped out the fact that they'd been robbed, or whether they were trying to help you. You don't care which it is. The field springs up around you and the next button you touch—the one on the board that hasn't been used so far—sends you off into nothingness. There is no beam of light, you can't hear a thing, and you're safe.

It isn't much of a trip back. You sit there smoking and letting your nerves settle back to normal. You notice a third set of buttons, with some pencil marks over them—"Press these to return to yourself 30 years"—and you begin waiting for the air to get stale. It doesn't because there is only one of you this time.

Instead, everything flashes off and you're sitting in the machine in your own back yard.

You'll figure out the cycle in more details later. You get into the machine in front of your house, go to the future in the sub-basement, land in your back yard, and then hop back thirty years to pick up yourself, landing in front of your house. Just that. But right then, you don't care. You jump out and start pulling out that atomic generator and taking it inside.

IT ISN'T hard to disassemble, but you don't learn a thing; just some plates of metal, some spiral coils, and a few odds and ends—all things that can be made easily enough, all obviously of common metals. But when you put it together again, about an hour later, you notice something.

Everything in it is brand-new and there's one set of copper wires missing! It won't work. You put some #12 house wire in, exactly like the set on the other side, drop in some iron filings, and try it again.

And with the controls set at 120 volts, 60 cycles and 15 amperes, you get just that. You don't need the power company any more. And you feel a little happier when you realize that the luggage space wasn't insulated from time effects by a field, so the motor has moved backward in time, somehow, and is back to its original youth—minus

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the replaced wires the guard mentioned—which probably wore out because of the makeshift job you've just done.

But you begin getting more of a jolt when you find that the papers are all in your own writing, that your name is down as the inventor, and that the date of the patent application is 1951.

It will begin to soak in, then. You pick up an atomic generator in the future and bring it back to the past—your present—so that it can be put in the museum with you as the inventor so you can steal it to be the inventor. And you do it in a time machine which you bring back to yourself to take yourself into the future to return to take back to yourself . . .

Who invented what? And who built which?

Before long, your riches from the generator are piling in. Little kids from school are coming around to stare at the man who changed history and made atomic power so common that no nation could hope to be anything but a democracy and a peaceful one—after some of the worst times in history for a few years. Your name eventually becomes as common as Ampere, or Faraday, or any other spelled without a capital letter.

But you're thinking of the puzzle. You can't find any answer.

One day you come across an old poem—something about some folks calling it evolution and others calling it God. You go out, make a few provisions for the future, and come back to climb into the time machine that's waiting in the building you had put around it. Then you'll be knocking on your own door, thirty years back—or right now, from your view—and telling your younger self all these things I'm telling you.

But now . . .

Well, the drinks are finished. You're woozy enough to go along with me without protest, and I want to find out just why those people up there came looking for you and shouting, before the time machine left.

Let's go.

—LESTER DEL REY

The Big News Next Month. . . .

The Wind Between the Worlds

A Major Novelet by LESTER DEL REY

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The Protector

BY BETSY CURTIS

There's a fortune in a boxer who feels no pain. This one didn't, except in odd ways...

HOW come I live here on Gorlin permanent? Well, it's something like this.

There is nobody real surprised when some scientist writes an article in the Sunday supplement about the primitive tribes of Anestha dying out, probably. The Anesthon natives is freaks, anyway, and folks

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

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just naturally figure they can't last long in stiff competition. If you are like them and your body don't feel any pain any time, you need a nursemaid around to keep you from doing dumb things, like walking in front of a truck or starving to death.

I am here on Gorlin a couple times and know about 'em. Some folks think it's comical to watch the space crews think up ways to give an Anesthon a workout. I see one Anesthon girl—a real looker she is, too—dance fourteen hours before she gives out, just for a bottle of perfume and one of them Venusian fur lounge robes. They sure enjoy their pleasures, even if they never feel no pain. You feeling any? More thiska?

Hey, Noor! Another round of thiska for the boys!

Well, they can feel your feelings, and any thoughts that are about them, too. I guess all they live for is pleasure and a pat on the back. One time a little runty Anesthon guy even builds a whole stone blockhouse for a first looie, when the looie thinks real hard that the little guy looks like a first-rate hod carrier. Time the house is built, the Anesthon's hands is all bloody and one ankle broke where a chunk of rock drops on him. He don't notice it, of course.

Pierre gets all worked up about them Anestha dying out. That's my boy Pierre, the heavyweight. I name him Pierre so's nobody thinks he is tough till afterward. He comes from Gorlin. Of course I have to stable him on Venus long enough for a legal residence, or the Boxing Commission would have him investigated and maybe banned from the ring as a telepath. Tough training him, too. He can't see the sense of fighting, but, man, he can stay in the ring all night. He never does get real speedy on his feet, but he learns fast and packs a wicked left. I don't have to lie when I am thinking real hard he is champeen material.

Anyhow, Pierre gets all worked up over his race getting extinct. He has a sister who is glenched to some nice boy and his old man is some sort of a chief. He is all for beating it back by the next via-Venus ship to see what is getting at the old folks at home. I calm him down though, give him a couple of shots of thiska and say I better take him around to see that scientist-dopester and get the inside first. I have to go everywhere with him to see he doesn't break a leg and forget to tell me about it.

SO WE hope a TAT in Chi and make for Washington where this science fellow is with some Smithsonian Institute. He is nice enough about seeing us, but he can't figure how a Chinaman like Pierre has any call to be steamed up about the Anestha (you seen these Anestha with their slick black hair and goldy skin and smooth eyelids like

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a Earth Chinaman) so I have to break down and tell him about Pierre being an Anesthon.

That scientist is pretty peeved with me bringing Pierre into the Earth system, but when I tell him Pierre wants to go back to help out the folks, he kind of clams up and says the article is just one of those Sunday paper things. There don't really seem to be anything wrong on Gorlin except that all the workers are getting more careless than usual, falling off walls they are building and getting hit by rocks during blasting, or walking in front of full cars in the mines.

Pierre gives the man a look. "Workers? Mines? Blasting?" he says. "What gives? There are no mines on Gorlin," he says, "just a few quarries and a lot of big farms. We never have to kill ourselves working. What gives?" he says.

"Oh," the man comes back, "there's a couple big targ mines in full swing. Some big Earth concern is shipping out the stuff five freighters a day to Mercury for mass insulation. All native workers. They don't get paid much—weej cigarettes, bubble bath, some thiska, electro-fur blankets, stuff like that—but I don't hear yapping. If I do, I report anything that looks like slavery." Of course he says it with a lot of grammar and it takes him a half hour, but that is the slant.

He wants to gab some then with Pierre. I see that the boy is getting jittery and homesick, too, when the guy starts raving about swimming in the flaff pools and the feeling of katweela petals under your bare feet, so I says we have to catch a plane and get out of there.

Pierre still wants to head for Gorlin. He says his people must be unhappy about something or they are more careful. Life on Gorlin is too much fun to just go and die for no reason.

I try to pep him up on the way back to Chi, talking about his next fight with Kid Bop, but he says he can't see any reason in fighting, either, just now. I tell him I think he kind of likes fighting, but he says what he likes is the nice things I think about him when he wins, and he is too worried about his family to pay much attention to what I think just now.

WELL, we are both pretty flush from one of the best fight seasons I ever see and a rest won't hurt the boy, so I say okay, we are going by the first liner off the Flats.

"You don't have to go, Joe," he says. "Keep your dough and train a couple more kids. I may not be back," he says.

"Look, boy," I says, "you know what the food is like on them liners," I says, kind of kidding, "and if there's nobody around to cram it down you, you don't eat, and if you don't eat, you starve—and if you starve, you are in no condition to cheer up your sister and

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your old man. Besides," I says, "I can afford a vacation and you're the only fighter I want to work with. You've got a real future," I says, "and I'm going to bring you back alive."

I guess that makes him feel kind of good, because he grins first time since he reads that paper and says, "All right, Joe, come on along."

WE BUY a few pretties and neckties in the station and ship out of Chi for the Flats on the next TAT. Pierre wants to get some perfume for his sister, but I tell him we can get better on Venus, where all the good stuff is made.

The trip from Venus Space Base to Gorlin is fast on account of overdrive, but even so I have no trouble passing Pierre off as a fighter who has the jitters and is headed for a vacation where he learns to take it easy the easy way. He is always burning his fingers or his mouth on a cigarette, and I have to keep an eye on him all the time. Nerves, I explain to the passengers.

When we land, Pierre is all for hunting up his folks, but I says no, if there is some trouble, it is smarter to case the joint. We check in at the swanky tourist hotel. She is new since I am on Gorlin a couple years ago and what class! She is built around one of the biggest flaff pools on the whole planet and our room is completely lined with padded velvety stuff, sort of a deep red color, and the bathroom has a cloudrift shower that you nearly float away on.

But Pierre just doesn't relax. I keep trying to make him get in the shower, but it is no use. He says he is just too worried to take any pleasure in it. I don't think we ought to go scouting till night and that is thirty some hours yet, but when I see he is settling down to wear the fuzz right off the floor walking round and round, I give in, feed him a sandwich I bring from the ship, and we stroll off in the woods like we are looking for flowers.

There are no signs around the hotel saying which way to the mines, so we set off to circle the hotel and spaceport clearing to look for the rail-line that brings the targ to the port. I figure we have gone about two-thirds of the way around when I nearly fall over a guy sitting on the ground with his head in his hands. What I think is katweela flowers is just the red Anesthon kloa he has on. He looks up sort of dull and then he sees Pierre with me. He lets out a yip and sits back hard on the ground and moans. Pierre yanks the fellow up on his feet and hugs him and starts to jabber away so fast I can't tell what he is saying. Foreigners always talk faster than anybody else. The other guy puts in a word or two every once in a while and then he scrams off through the trees.

"That's Noor," Pierre informs me, "the guy my sister Jennel is

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glenched to. He's gonna get us a couple of kloas so nobody'll notice us around the mine. He's feeling mighty low, but I can't figure out why. He says Jennel and the old man are okay, only he can't ever carry Jennel to his own house because he ain't man enough. I don't get it. He can make a good fighter, Joe."

BEFORE you can count three, Noor is back again with the kloas and Pierre strips and gets into his. I ain't too keen to show my shapelies, but Pierre starts grabbing my shirt and I have to put the kloa on or else. The boys head south at a good clip and I tag along trying to catch up and find out the score. When Pierre sees I am making like winded, he slows down and tells me we are going to the mine owner's fancy dump about two miles down the drag. Pierre says Noor tells him the mine owner doesn't like him and he has to leave us when we get in sight of the house.

After about a mile, Noor begins to drag along. Then he just sits down under another tree and says that is the end of the line for him. He points through the trees and says go on, maybe he is still there when we come back, maybe not. While Pierre is jawing with him, I look up the trail and see a Anesthon babe about a hundred feet away. You can tell it is a babe from one of them blue and green mollos draped around her over the kloa.

Noor sees her, too, and takes off like a bat back the way we come. Pierre jogs ahead and when I get up with him, there he is hugging and jabbering again.

"My sister Jennel," he says, and, "Jennel, this is Joe, my manager."

She is a cute trick with lots of yumph showing through the molla. She stands kind of slumped, though, and a few of the flowers in her shiny black hair are pretty mashed.

" 'Smatter, Jennel?" I says. "You look kind of dragged out for a dame whose brother comes home practically a champeen. Katweela flowers go on strike?" I says, just trying to make talk.

She slumps a little more and says the boss don't like her and how it's too bad her brother has to come home and find her still alive and cluttering up the woods.

I tell Pierre she better take us to this boss that don't like a babe like her, but she just shakes her head and says go that way and we come to the house. Then she says the boss makes the natives use the employees' entrance on the other side of the house and she offers to take and show us the way. She kind of twitches when she says "natives."

She don't even says yes or no all the way to the gate till, just before we get there, I trip on a root and bang my knee on a rock on the way down. Well, I howl and cuss some and she comes up close and asks me what seems to be the matter. I

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tell her the blamed rock hurts my knee and I think real hard about how her knee would feel if a rock hits it and she busts right out crying.

"Oh, you poor man, you poor man, you," she sobs. "That rock don't like you at all."

"It don't hate me, either," I says. "It's only a rock."

"But it makes a hurt to you. It don't love you and now you are not happy where there's any rocks because they don't love you," she says, and she helps me up and starts dragging me along, still crying like crazy.

I DON'T make nothing out of that, but pretty soon we come to a little gate in a thick row of bushes. Jennel lets go of me then and says she hopes Pierre is a strong man and a good worker and that the boss likes him. And then she gives a big sigh and says if the boss don't like him, we can find her over there where the men are cutting down a bunch of trees, because if one of the trees likes her, it will maybe fall on her pretty soon.

Pierre tells her to wait right there by the gate because he is coming back. He isn't looking for work so the boss won't care if he is strong or not. She just sighs again and sits down on the grass and whimpers.

Pierre tries once more to get her to tell him what is the matter, but all she says is that their father and some other fellow named Frith are up at the big house. They are being talked to by the boss about not getting out enough targ on the shifts where they are foremen, and she says how sad it is about Pierre coming home.

It is just beginning to filter through my thick skull that the boss is connected with all this dying out of the Anestha, as the Sunday paper puts it, and I grab Pierre away from Jennel and hustle him through the gate.

"Look, Pierre," I says, "we'll go around and listen by them long windows and see what cooks. I'll bet that boss is up to something dirty in there. If he is the one who messed up Jennel," I says, "we better just mess him up some."

There is nobody in sight on the lawn and we just march up to the window easy as pie. There is this big booming voice giving somebody what for.

"You poor miserable idiots," yells this voice, "you can't keep the workers off the tracks and you get out less than twenty tons of targ since last night, and then you waste a whole charge of nitro by not telling the watchman he's not supposed to smoke in the enclosure. All those people are dead and it's your fault."

I hear a sniffle behind me and when I turn around, there is Jennel. She has sneaked up behind us to see what we are going to do.

"That's how he talks to me, too," she lets us know in a whisper, "only he says I am not fit to even

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wash dishes, let alone ever have a house of my own . . . when I drop one of his plates a little while ago. He says I am looking in a mirror instead of where I am going and he hopes I see what an ugly pan I have, because I ought to know it and keep out of people's way so they won't have to look at me." Her tears splash right down on the grass.

"And that's not all," the yelling inside goes on. "Not only do you kill off all my workers, but at this rate I'm losing money paying you four packs of cigarettes a day. If I have to blast off and start from scratch in some other part of this blamed universe, you stupid, gutless . . . why, you aren't even men. You worms don't even run when you see a car coming at you. Too blamed dumb to come in out of the rain."

I stick my head around the corner and look in, and there is the back of a big guy in a Mercury-made suit and with a bald head that is red all the way round to the back of his neck. On the other side of the room I see a couple of the sorriest-looking Anestha God ever makes, shuffling their feet and looking like kicked dogs.

I turn to Pierre. "Go in there swinging," I says, like at a fight, and pull the window open.

"He won't like me," Pierre says, hanging back. "He says Anestha are dumb cowards. Maybe he knows. Maybe I won't dare hit him."

"You get in there and poke him, boy," I says and give him a push. "I like you and I see you fight and the Anestha got more guts than anybody!"

THE big guy hears us and turns around. "Get out of here, you mangy natives," he bellows. "You good for nothing, shivering, sniveling, cowardly boobs. I'm not ready for you yet." He is shaking a whippy-looking cane at me and Pierre, and I think he has turned purple.

"We're ready for you, though," I yell back. I climb into the room pulling Pierre in after me. "Pierre's no sniveling coward and you can quit talking to his brave, heroic, self-sacrificing father like that. Put 'em up and defend yourself, you howling ape," I yell, "because Pierre is going to give you the beating of your howling life!"

I see Pierre's old man and the other fellow spruce up some.

The big guy sits down in a chair real quick, and, sucking in a big breath, he starts going all fatherly at Pierre, telling him that he doesn't want to have to hit him back, because Pierre will not feel it when he kills him, which he doesn't want to have to do because Pierre is just a poor weak Anesthon who don't know from nothing, and he doesn't want to injure any of his workers and he is just telling Pierre's old man a few things to protect the Anestha.

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Pierre looks at me kind of doubtful.

"Go on, hit the fat bully," I says, real icy. "He has it coming. You owe it to your old man and Noor and Jennel here. Go ahead and show him what kind of champeens the Anestha can turn out. It's just for his own good," I says, "so hit him now. Then you can tell your dad what a great guy you are."

Pierre's left obediently swings into the lug's jaw with a crack like a rifle. He don't even watch the big guy sag down on the floor. He begins hugging his father and the other fellow and grinning and jabbering away like blue blazes.

The big guy is still breathing, but out cold, so I go to look for a televiz. I figure the authorities better hear my story before the big guy wakes up.

After I make my spiel, the port chief says to come in and bring Pierre and his father and Frith and Jennel and Noor, too, if we can find him, and make an official recorded report. He is sending a doctor out by 'copter.

We beat it for the port, leaving the fat boss sleeping on the floor.

We all stay in protective custody at the hotel, swimming in flaff and lounging around the thiska bar for a couple of weeks, until the commission headed by that scientist from the Smithsonian Institute comes out and takes the boss back to Earth. He has to see a judge about why he should not go into stir for a while for psychological coercion or something like that.

Before they leave, the commission hands me an official charge at a hundred thou a year to stay as Protector of Morale to the Anestha. That is better than the fight racket, but the protectorship is a laugh. I can't even go out for a walk without a couple dozen Anestha tagging along, to keep me from stubbing my toe on some unfriendly pebble, or socking my eye on some unloving devil of a doorknob.

—BETSY CURTIS

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Second Childhood

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Achieving immortality is only half of the problem. The other half is knowing how to live with it once it's been made possible—*and inescapable!*

YOU did not die.

There was no normal way to die.

You lived as carelessly and as recklessly as you could and you hoped that _ would be lucky and be accidentally killed.

You kept on living and you got tired of living.

"God, how tired a man can get of living!" Andrew Young said.

John Riggs, chairman of the immortality commission, cleared his throat.

"You realize," he said to Andrew Young, "that this petition is a highly irregular procedure to bring to our attention."

He picked up the sheaf of papers off the table and ruffled through them rapidly.

Illustrated by DON HUNTER

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"There is no precedent," he added.

"I had hoped," said Andrew Young, "to establish precedent."

Commissioner Stanford said, "I must admit that you have made a good case, Ancestor Young. Yet you must realize that this commission has no possible jurisdiction over the life of any person, except to see that everyone is assured of all the benefits of immortality and to work out any kinks that may show up."

"I am well aware of that," answered Young, "and it seems to me that my case is one of the kinks you mention."

He stood silently, watching the faces of the members of the board. They are afraid, he thought. Every one of them. Afraid of the day they will face the thing I am facing now. They have sought an answer and there is no answer yet except the pitifully basic answer, the brutally fundamental answer that I have given them.

"My request is simple," he told them, calmly. "I have asked for permission to discontinue life. And since suicide has been made psychologically impossible, I have asked that this commission appoint a panel of next-friends to make the necessary and somewhat distasteful arrangements to bring about the discontinuance of my life."

"If we did," said Riggs, "we would destroy everything we have. There is no virtue in a life of only five thousand years. No more than in a life of only a hundred years. If Man is to be immortal, he must be genuinely immortal. He cannot compromise."

"And yet," said Young, "my friends are gone."

HE GESTURED at the papers Riggs held in his hands. "I have them listed there," he said. "Their names and when and where and how they died. Take a look at them. More than two hundred names. People of my own generation and of the generations closely following mine. Their names and the photo-copies of their death certificates."

He put both of his hands upon the table, palms flat against the table, and leaned his weight upon his arms.

"Take a look at how they died," he said. "Every one involves accidental violence. Some of them drove their vehicles too fast and, more than likely, very recklessly. One fell off a cliff when he reached down to pick a flower that was growing on its edge. A case of deliberately poor judgment, to my mind. One got stinking drunk and took a bath and passed out in the tub. He drowned . . ."

"Ancestor Young," Riggs said sharply, "you are surely not implying these folks were suicides."

"No," Andrew Young said bitterly. "We abolished suicide three thousand years ago, cleared it clean

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out of human minds. How could they have killed themselves?"

Stanford said, peering up at Young, "I believe, sir, you sat on the board that resolved that problem."

Andrew Young nodded. "It was after the first wave of suicides. I remember it quite well. It took years of work. We had to change human perspective, shift certain facets of human nature. We had to condition human reasoning by education and propaganda and instill a new set of moral values. I think we did a good job of it. Perhaps too good a job. Today a man can no more think of deliberately committing suicide than he could think of overthrowing our government. The very idea, the very word is repulsive, instinctively repulsive. You can come a long way, gentlemen, in three thousand years."

He leaned across the table and tapped the sheaf of papers with a lean, tense finger.

"They didn't kill themselves," he said. "They did not commit suicide. They just didn't give a damn. They were tired of living . . . as I am tired of living. So they lived recklessly in every way. Perhaps there always was a secret hope that they would drown while drunk or their car would hit a tree or . . ."

HE STRAIGHTENED up and faced them. "Gentlemen," he said. "I am 5,786 years of age. I was born at Lancaster, Maine, on the planet Earth on September 21, 1968. I have served humankind well in those fifty-seven centuries. My record is there for you to see. Boards, commissions, legislative posts, diplomatic missions. No one can say that I have shirked my duty. I submit that I have paid any debt I owe humanity . . . even the well-intentioned debt for a chance at immortality."

"We wish," said Riggs, "that you would reconsider."

"I am a lonely man," replied Young. "A lonely man and tired. I have no friends. There is nothing any longer that holds my interest. It is my hope that I can make you see the desirability of assuming jurisdiction in cases such as mine. Someday you may find a solution to the problem, but until that time arrives, I ask you, in the name of mercy, to give us relief from life."

"The problem, as we see it," said Riggs, "is to find some way to wipe out mental perspective. When a man lives as you have, sir, for fifty centuries, he has too long a memory. The memories add up to the disadvantage of present realities and prospects for the future."

"I know," said Young. "I remember we used to talk about that in the early days. It was one of the problems which was recognized when immortality first became practical. But we always thought that memory would erase itself, that the brain could accommodate only so many memories, that when it got

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full up it would dump the old ones. It hasn't worked that way."

He made a savage gesture. "Gentlemen, I can recall my childhood much more vividly than I recall anything that happened yesterday."

"Memories are buried," said Riggs, "and in the old days, when men lived no longer than a hundred years at most, it was thought those buried memories were forgotten. Life, Man told himself, is a process of forgetting. So Man wasn't too worried over memories when he became immortal. He thought he would forget them."

"He should have known," argued Young. "I can remember my father, and I remember him much more intimately than I will remember you gentlemen once I leave this room. . . . I can remember my father telling me that, in his later years, he could recall things which happened in his childhood that had been forgotten all his younger years. And that, alone, should have tipped us off. The brain buries only the newer memories deeply . . . they are not available; they do not rise to bother one, because they are not sorted or oriented or correlated or whatever it is that the brain may do with them. But once they are all nicely docketed and filed, they pop up in an instant."

RIGGS nodded agreement. "There's a lag of a good many years in the brain's bookkeeping. We will overcome it in time."

"We have tried," said Stanford. "We tried conditioning, the same solution that worked with suicides. But in this, it didn't work. For a man's life is built upon his memories. There are certain basic memories that must remain intact. With conditioning, you could not be selective. You could not keep the structural memories and winnow out the trash. It didn't work that way."

"There was one machine that worked," Riggs put in. "It got rid of memories. I don't understand exactly how it worked, but it did the job all right. It did too good a job. It swept the mind as clean as an empty room. It didn't leave a thing. It took all memories and it left no capacity to build a new set. A man went in a human being and came out a vegetable."

"Suspended animation," said Stanford, "would be a solution. If we had suspended animation. Simply stack a man away until we found the answer, then revive and recondition him."

"Be that as it may," Young told them, "I should like your most earnest consideration of my petition. I do not feel quite equal to waiting until you have the answer solved."

Riggs said, harshly, "You are asking us to legalize death."

Young nodded. "If you wish to phrase it that way. I'm asking it in the name of common decency."

Commissioner Stanford said,

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"We can ill afford to lose you, Ancestor."

Young sighed. "There is that damned attitude again. Immortality pays all debts. When a man is made immortal, he has received full compensation for everything that he may endure. I have lived longer than any man could be expected to live and still I am denied the dignity of old age. A man's desires are few, and quickly sated, and yet he is expected to continue living with desires burned up and blown away to ash. He gets to a point where nothing has a value . . . even to a point where his own personal values are no more than shadows. Gentlemen, there was a time when I could not have committed murder . . . literally could not have forced myself to kill another man . . . but today I could, without a second thought. Disillusion and cynicism have crept in upon me and I have no conscience."

"THERE are compensations," Riggs said. "Your family . . ."

"They get in my hair," said Young disgustedly. "Thousands upon thousands of young squirts calling me Grandsire and Ancestor and coming to me for advice they practically never follow. I don't know even a fraction of them and I listen to them carefully explain a relationship so tangled and trivial that it makes me yawn in their faces. It's all new to them and so old, so damned and damnably old to me."

"Ancestor Young," said Stanford, "you have seen Man spread out from Earth to distant stellar systems. You have seen the human race expand from one planet to several thousand planets. You have had a part in this. Is there not some satisfaction . . ."

"You're talking in abstracts," Young cut in. "What I am concerned about is myself . . . a certain specific mass of protoplasm shaped in biped form and tagged by the designation, ironic as it may seem, of Andrew Young. I have been unselfish all my life. I've asked little for myself. Now I am being utterly and entirely selfish and I ask that this matter be regarded as a personal problem rather than as a racial abstraction."

"Whether you'll admit it or not," said Stanford, "it is more than a personal problem. It is a problem which some day must be solved for the salvation of the race."

"That is what I am trying to impress upon you," Young snapped. "It is a problem that you must face. Some day you will solve it, but until you do, you must make provisions for those who face the unsolved problem."

"Wait a while," counseled Chairman Riggs. "Who knows? Today, tomorrow."

"Or a million years from now," Young told him bitterly and left, a

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tall, vigorous-looking man whose step was swift in anger where normally it was slow with weariness and despair.

THERE was yet a chance, of course.

But there was little hope.

How can a man go back almost six thousand years and snare a thing he never understood?

And yet Andrew Young remembered it. Remembered it as clearly as if it had been a thing that had happened in the morning of this very day.

It was a shining thing, a bright thing, a happiness that was brand-new and fresh as a bluebird's wing of an April morning or a shy woods flower after sudden rain.

He had been a boy and he had seen the bluebird and he had no words to say the thing he felt, but he had held up his tiny fingers and pointed and shaped his lips to coo.

Once, he thought, I had it in my very fingers and I did not have the experience to know what it was, nor the value of it. And now I know the value, but it has escaped me—it escaped me on the day that I began to think like a human being. The first adult thought pushed it just a little and the next one pushed it farther and finally it was gone entirely and I didn't even know that it had gone.

He sat in the chair on the flagstone patio and felt the Sun upon him, filtering through the branches of trees misty with the breaking leaves of Spring.

Something else, thought Andrew Young. Something that was not human—yet. A tiny animal that had many ways to choose, many roads to walk. And, of course, I chose the wrong way. I chose the human way. But there was another way. I know there must have been. A fairy way—or a brownie way, or maybe even pixie. That sounds foolish and childish now, but it wasn't always.

I chose the human way because I was guided into it. I was pushed and shoved, like a herded sheep.

I grew up and I lost the thing I held.

He sat and made his mind go hard and tried to analyze what it was he sought and there was no name for it. Except happiness. And happiness was a state of being, not a thing to regain and grasp.

BUT he could remember how it felt. With his eyes open in the present, he could remember the brightness of the day of the past, the clean-washed goodness of it, the wonder of the colors that were more brilliant than he ever since had seen—as if it were the first second after Creation and the world was still shiningly new.

It was that new, of course. It would be that new to a child.

But that didn't explain it all.

It didn't explain the bottomless capacity for seeing and knowing and believing in the beauty and the

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goodness of a clean new world. It didn't explain the almost non-human elation of knowing that there were colors to see and scents to smell and soft green grass to touch.

I'm insane, Andrew Young said to himself. Insane, or going insane. But if insanity will take me back to an understanding of the strange perception I had when I was a child, and lost, I'll take insanity.

He leaned back in his chair and let his eyes go shut and his mind drift back.

He was crouching in a corner of a garden and the leaves were drifting down from the walnut trees like a rain of saffron gold. He lifted one of the leaves and it slipped from his fingers, for his hands were chubby still and not too sure in grasping. But he tried again and he clutched it by the stem in one stubby fist and he saw that it was not just a blob of yellowness, but delicate, with many little veins. When he held it so that the Sun struck it, he imagined that he could almost see through it, the gold was spun so fine.

He crouched with the leaf clutched tightly in his hand and for a moment there was a silence that held him motionless. Then he heard the frost-loosened leaves pattering all around him, pattering as they fell, talking in little whispers as they sailed down through the air and found themselves a bed with their golden fellows.

In that moment he knew that he was one with the leaves and the whispers that they made, one with the gold and the autumn sunshine and the far blue mist upon the hill above the apple orchard.

A foot crunched stone behind him and his eyes came open and the golden leaves were gone.

"I am sorry if I disturbed you, Ancestor," said the man. "I had an appointment for this hour, but I would not have disturbed you if I had known."

Young stared at him reproachfully without answering.

"I am kin," the man told him.

"I wouldn't doubt it," said Andrew Young. "The Galaxy is cluttered up with descendants of mine."

The man was very humble. "Of course, you must resent us sometimes. But we are proud of you, sir. I might almost say that we revere you. No other family—"

"I know," interrupted Andrew Young. "No other family has any fossil quite so old as I am."

"Nor as wise," said the man.

Andrew Young snorted. "Cut out that nonsense. Let's hear what you have to say and get it over with."

THE technician was harassed and worried and very frankly puzzled. But he stayed respectful, for one always was respectful to an ancestor, whoever he might be. Today there were mighty few left who had been born into a mortal world.

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Not that Andrew Young looked old. He looked like all adults, a fine figure of a person in the early twenties.

The technician shifted uneasily. "But, sir, this . . . this . . ."

"Teddy bear," said Young.

"Yes, of course. An extinct terrestrial subspecies of animal?"

"It's a toy," Young told him. "A very ancient toy. All children used to have them five thousand years ago. They took them to bed."

THE technician shuddered. "A deplorable custom. Primitive."

"Depends on the viewpoint," said Young. "I've slept with them many a time. There's a world of comfort in one, I can personally assure you."

The technician saw that it was no use to argue. He might as well fabricate the thing and get it over with.

"I can build you a fine model, sir," he said, trying to work up some enthusiasm. "I'll build in a response mechanism so that it can give simple answers to certain keyed questions and, of course, I'll fix it so it'll walk, either on two legs or four. . . ."

"No," said Andrew Young.

The technician looked surprised and hurt. "No?"

"No," repeated Andrew Young. "I don't want it fancied up. I want it a simple lump of make-believe. No wonder the children of today have no imagination. Modern toys entertain them with a bag of tricks that leave the young'uns no room for imagination. They couldn't possibly think up, on their own, all the screwy things these new toys do. Built-in responses and implied consciousness and all such mechanical trivia. . . ."

"You just want a stuffed fabric," said the technician, sadly, "with jointed arms and legs."

"Precisely," agreed Young.

"You're sure you want fabric, sir? I could do a neater job in plastics."

"Fabric," Young insisted firmly, "and it must be scratchy."

"Scratchy, sir?"

"Sure. You know. Bristly. So it scratches when you rub your face against it."

"But no one in his right mind would want to rub his face . . ."

"I would," said Andrew Young. "I fully intend to do so."

"As you wish, sir," the technician answered, beaten now.

"When you get it done," said Young, "I have some other things in mind."

"Other things?" The technician looked wildly about, as if seeking some escape.

"A high chair," said Young. "And a crib. And a woolly dog. And buttons."

"Buttons?" asked the technician. "What are buttons?"

"I'll explain it all to you," Young told him airily. "It all is very simple."

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IT SEEMED, when Andrew Young came into the room, that Riggs and Stanford had been expecting him, had known that he was coming and had been waiting for him.

He wasted no time on preliminaries or formalities.

They know, he told himself. They know, or they have guessed. They would be watching me. Ever since I brought in my petition, they have been watching me, wondering what I would be thinking, trying to puzzle out what I might do next. They know every move I've made, they know about the toys and the furniture and all the other things. And I don't need to tell them what I plan to do.

"I need some help," he said, and they nodded soberly, as if they had guessed he needed help.

"I want to build a house," he explained. "A big house. Much larger than the usual house."

Riggs said, "We'll draw the plans for you. Do anything else that you—"

"A house," Young went on, "about four or five times as big as the ordinary house. Four or five times normal scale, I mean. Doors twenty-five to thirty feet high and everything else in proportion."

"Neighbors or privacy?" asked Stanford.

"Privacy," said Young.

"We'll take care of it," promised Riggs. "Leave the matter of the house to us."

Young stood for a long moment, looking at the two of them. Then he said, "I thank you, gentlemen. I thank you for your helpfulness and your understanding. But most of all I thank you for not asking any questions."

He turned slowly and walked out of the room and they sat in silence for minutes after he was gone.

Finally, Stanford offered a deduction: "It will have to be a place that a boy would like. Woods to run in and a little stream to fish in and a field where he can fly his kites. What else could it be?"

"He's been out ordering children's furniture and toys," Riggs agreed. "Stuff from five thousand years ago. The kind of things he used when he was a child. But scaled to adult size."

"Now," said Stanford, "he wants a house built to the same proportions. A house that will make him think or help him believe that he is a child. But will it work, Riggs? His body will not change. He cannot make it change. It will only be in his mind."

"Illusion," declared Riggs. "The illusion of bigness in relation to himself. To a child, creeping on the floor, a door is twenty-five to thirty feet high, relatively. Of course the child doesn't know that. But Andrew Young does. I don't see how he'll overcome that."

"At first," suggested Stanford, "he will know that it's illusion, but

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after a time, isn't there a possibility that it will become reality so far as he's concerned? That's why he needs our help. So that the house will not be firmly planted in his memory as a thing that's merely out of proportion . . . so that it will slide from illusion into reality without too great a strain."

"We must keep our mouths shut." Riggs nodded soberly. "There must be no interference. It's a thing he must do himself . . . entirely by himself. Our help with the house must be the help of an unseen, silent agency. Like brownies, I think the term was that he used, we must help and be never seen. Intrusion by anyone would introduce a jarring note and would destroy illusion and that is all he has to work on. Illusion pure and simple."

"Others have tried," objected Stanford, pessimistic again. "Many others. With gadgets and machines . . ."

"None has tried it," said Riggs, "with the power of mind alone. With the sheer determination to wipe out five thousand years of memory."

"That will be his stumbling block," said Stanford. "The old, dead memories are the things he has to beat. He has to get rid of them . . . not just bury them, but get rid of them for good and all, forever."

"He must do more than that," said Riggs. "He must replace his memories with the outlook he had when he was a child. His mind must be washed out, refreshed, wiped clean and shining and made new again . . . ready to live another five thousand years."

The two men sat and looked at one another and in each other's eyes they saw a single thought—the day would come when they, too, each of them alone, would face the problem Andrew Young faced.

"We must help," said Riggs, "in every way we can and we must keep watch and we must be ready . . . but Andrew Young cannot know that we are helping or that we are watching him. We must anticipate the materials and tools and the aids that he may need."

STANFORD started to speak, then hesitated, as if seeking in his mind for the proper words.

"Yes," said Riggs. "What is it?"

"Later on," Stanford managed to say, "much later on, toward the very end, there is a certain factor that we must supply. The one thing that he will need the most and the one thing that he cannot think about, even in advance. All the rest can be stage setting and he can still go on toward the time when it becomes reality. All the rest may be make-believe, but one thing must come as genuine or the entire effort will collapse in failure."

Riggs nodded. "Of course. That's something we'll have to work out carefully."

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"If we can," Stanford said.

THE yellow button over here and the red one over there and the green one doesn't fit, so I'll throw it on the floor and just for the fun of it, I'll put the pink one in my mouth and someone will find me with it and they'll raise a ruckus because they will be afraid that I will swallow it.

And there's nothing, absolutely nothing, that I love better than a full-blown ruckus. Especially if it is over me.

"Ug," said Andrew Young, and he swallowed the button.

He sat stiff and straight in the towering high chair and then, in a fury, swept the oversized muffin tin and its freight of buttons crashing to the floor.

For a second he felt like weeping in utter frustration and then a sense of shame crept in on him.

Big baby, he said to himself.

Crazy to be sitting in an overgrown high chair, playing with buttons and mouthing baby talk and trying to force a mind conditioned by five thousand years of life into the channels of an infant's thoughts.

Carefully he disengaged the tray and slid it out, cautiously shinnied down the twelve-foot-high chair.

The room engulfed him, the ceiling towering far above him.

The neighbors, he told himself, no doubt thought him crazy, although none of them had said so. Come to think of it, he had not seen any of his neighbors for a long spell now.

A suspicion came into his mind. Maybe they knew what he was doing, maybe they were deliberately keeping out of his way in order not to embarrass him.

That, of course, would be what they would do if they had realized what he was about. But he had expected . . . he had expected . . . that fellow, what's his name? . . . at the commission, what's the name of that commission, anyhow? Well, anyway, he'd expected a fellow whose name he couldn't remember from a commission the name of which he could not recall to come snooping around, wondering what he might be up to, offering to help, spoiling the whole setup, everything he'd planned.

I can't remember, he complained to himself. I can't remember the name of a man whose name I knew so short a time ago as yesterday. Nor the name of a commission that I knew as well as I know my name. I'm getting forgetful. I'm getting downright childish.

Childish?

Childish!

Childish and forgetful.

Good Lord, thought Andrew Young, that's just the way I want it.

On hands and knees he scrabbled about and picked up the buttons, put them in his pocket. Then, with the muffin tin underneath his arm, he shinnied up the high chair and,

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seating himself comfortably, sorted out the buttons in the pan.

The green one over here in this compartment and the yellow one . . . oops, there she goes onto the floor. And the red one in with the blue one and this one . . . this one . . . what's the color of this one? Color? What's that?

What is what?

What—

"IT'S almost time," said Stanford, "and we are ready, as ready as we'll ever be. We'll move in when the time is right, but we can't move in too soon. Better to be a little late than a little early. We have all the things we need. Special size diapers and—"

"Good Lord," exclaimed Riggs, "it won't go that far, will it?"

"It should," said Stanford. "It should go even further to work right. He got lost yesterday. One of our men found him and led him home. He didn't have the slightest idea where he was and he was getting pretty scared and he cried a little. He chattered about birds and flowers and he insisted that our man stay and play with him."

Riggs chuckled softly. "Did he?"

"Oh, certainly. He came back worn to a frazzle."

"Food?" asked Riggs. "How is he feeding himself?"

"We see there's a supply of stuff, cookies and such-wise, left on a low shelf, where he can get at them. One of the robots cooks up some more substantial stuff on a regular schedule and leaves it where he can find it. We have to be careful. We can't mess around too much. We can't intrude on him. I have a feeling he's almost reached an actual turning point. We can't afford to upset things now that he's come this far."

"The android's ready?"

"Just about," said Stanford.

"And the playmates?"

"Ready. They were less of a problem."

"There's nothing more that we can do?"

"Nothing," Stanford said. "Just wait, that's all. Young has carried himself this far by the sheer force of will alone. That will is gone now. He can't consciously force himself any further back. He is more child than adult now. He's built up a regressive momentum and the only question is whether that momentum is sufficient to carry him all the way back to actual babyhood."

"It has to go back to that?" Riggs looked unhappy, obviously thinking of his own future. "You're only guessing, aren't you?"

"All the way or it simply is no good," Stanford said dogmatically. "He has to get an absolutely fresh start. All the way or nothing."

"And if he gets stuck halfway between? Half child, half man, what then?"

"That's something I don't want to think about," Stanford said.

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HE HAD lost his favorite teddy bear and gone to hunt it in the dusk that was filled with elusive fireflies and the hush of a world quieting down for the time of sleep. The grass was drenched with dew and he felt the cold wetness of it soaking through his shoes as he went from bush to hedge to flower-bed, looking for the missing toy.

It was necessary, he told himself, that he find the nice little bear, for it was the one that slept with him and if he did not find it, he knew that it would spend a lonely and comfortless night. But at no time did he admit, even to his innermost thought, that it was he who needed the bear and not the bear who needed him.

A soaring bat swooped low and for a horrified moment, catching sight of the zooming terror, a blob of darkness in the gathering dusk, he squatted low against the ground, huddling against the sudden fear that came out of the night. Sounds of fright bubbled in his throat and now he saw the great dark garden as an unknown place, filled with lurking shadows that lay in wait for him.

He stayed cowering against the ground and tried to fight off the alien fear that growled from behind each bush and snarled in every darkened corner. But even as the fear washed over him, there was one hidden corner of his mind that knew there was no need of fear. It was as if that one area of

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his brain still fought against the rest of him, as if that small section of cells might know that the bat was no more than a flying bat, that the shadows in the garden were no more than absence of light.

There was a reason, he knew, why he should not be afraid—a good reason born of a certain knowledge he no longer had. And that he should have such knowledge seemed unbelievable, for he was scarcely two years old.

HE TRIED to say it—two years old.

There was something wrong with his tongue, something the matter with the way he had to use his mouth, with the way his lips refused to shape the words he meant to say.

He tried to define the words, tried to tell himself what he meant by two years old and one moment it seemed that he knew the meaning of it and then it escaped him.

The bat came again and he huddled close against the ground, shivering as he crouched. He lifted his eyes fearfully, darting glances here and there, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the looming house and it was a place he knew as refuge.

"House," he said, and the word was wrong, not the word itself, but the way he said it.

He ran on trembling, unsure feet and the great door loomed before him, with the latch too high to reach. But there was another way, a small swinging door built into the big door, the sort of door that is built for cats and dogs and sometimes little children. He darted through it and felt the sureness and the comfort of the house about him. The sureness and the comfort—and the loneliness.

He found his second-best teddy bear, and, picking it up, clutched it to his breast, sobbing into its scratchy back in pure relief from terror.

There is something wrong, he thought. Something dreadfully wrong. Something is as it should not be. It is not the garden or the darkened bushes or the swooping winged shape that came out of the night. It is something else, something missing, something that should be here and isn't.

Clutching the teddy bear, he sat rigid and tried desperately to drive his mind back along the way that would tell him what was wrong. There was an answer, he was sure of that. There was an answer somewhere; at one time he had known it. At one time he had recognized the need he felt and there had been no way to supply it—and now he couldn't even know the need, could feel it, but he could not know it.

He clutched the bear closer and huddled in the darkness, watching the moonbeam that came through a window, high above his head, and etched a square of floor in brightness.

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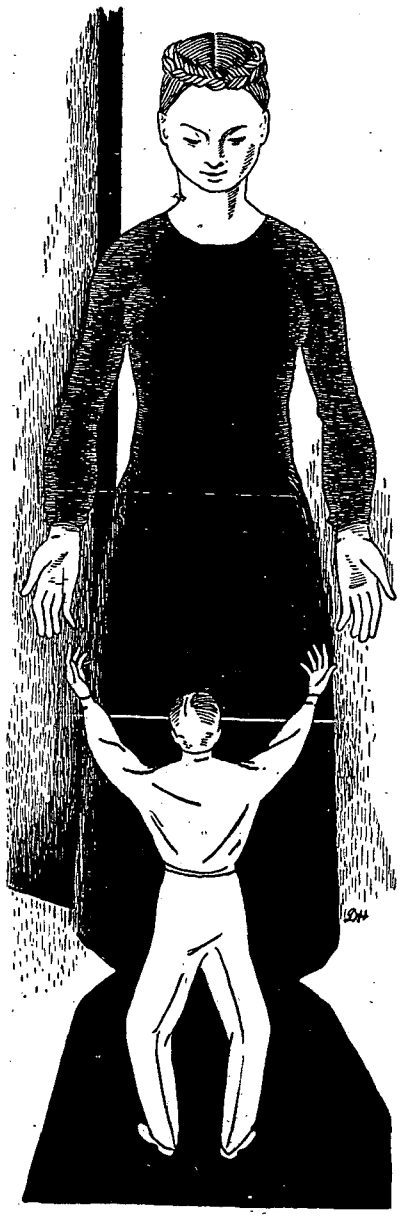

Fascinated, he watched the moonbeam and all at once the terror faded. He dropped the bear and crawled on hands and knees, stalking the moonbeam. It did not try to get away and he reached its edge and thrust his hands into it and laughed with glee when his hands were painted by the light coming through the window.

He lifted his face and stared up at the blackness and saw the white globe of the Moon, looking at him, watching him. The Moon seemed to wink at him and he chortled joyfully.

Behind him a door creaked open and he turned clumsily around.

Someone stood in the doorway, almost filling it—a beautiful person who smiled at him. Even in the darkness he could sense the sweetness of the smile, the glory of her golden hair.

"Time to eat, Andy," said the woman. "Eat and get a bath and then to bed."

Andrew Young hopped joyfully on both feet, arms held out—happy and excited and contented.

"Mummy!" he cried. "Mummy . . . Moon!"

He swung about with a pointing finger and the woman came swiftly across the floor, knelt and put her arms around him, held him close against her. His cheek against hers, he stared up at the Moon and it was a wondrous thing, a bright and golden thing, a wonder that was shining new and fresh.

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ON THE street outside, Stanford and Riggs stood looking up at the huge house that towered above the trees.

"She's in there now," said Stanford. "Everything's quiet so it must be all right."

Riggs said, "He was crying in the garden. He ran in terror for the house. He stopped crying about the time she must have come in."

Stanford nodded. "I was afraid we were putting it off too long, but I don't see now how we could have done it sooner. Any outside interference would have shattered the thing he tried to do. He had to really need her. Well, it's all right now. The timing was just about perfect."

"You're sure, Stanford?"

"Sure? Certainly I am sure. We created the android and we trained her. We instilled a deep maternal sense into her personality. She knows what to do. She is almost human. She is as close as we could come to a human mother eighteen feet tall. We don't know what Young's mother looked like, but chances are he doesn't either. Over the years his memory has idealized her. That's what we did. We made an ideal mother."

"If it only works," said Riggs.

"It will work," said Stanford, confidently. "Despite the shortcomings we may discover by trial and error, it will work. He's been fighting himself all this time. Now he can quit fighting and shift responsibility. It's enough to get him over the final hump, to place him safely and securely in the second childhood that he had to have. Now he can curl up, contented. There is someone to look after him and think for him and take care of him. He'll probably go back just a little further . . . a little closer to the cradle. And that is good, for the further he goes, the more memories are erased."

"And then?" asked Riggs worriedly.

"Then he can proceed to grow up again."

They stood watching, silently.

In the enormous house, lights came on in the kitchen and the windows gleamed with a homey brightness.

I, too, Stanford was thinking. Some day, I, too. Young has pointed the way, he has blazed the path. He had shown us, all the other billions of us, here on Earth and all over the Galaxy, the way it can be done. There will be others and for them there will be more help. We'll know then how to do it better.

Now we have something to work on.

Another thousand years or so, he thought, and I will go back, too. Back to the cradle and the dreams of childhood and the safe security of a mother's arms.

It didn't frighten him in the least.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

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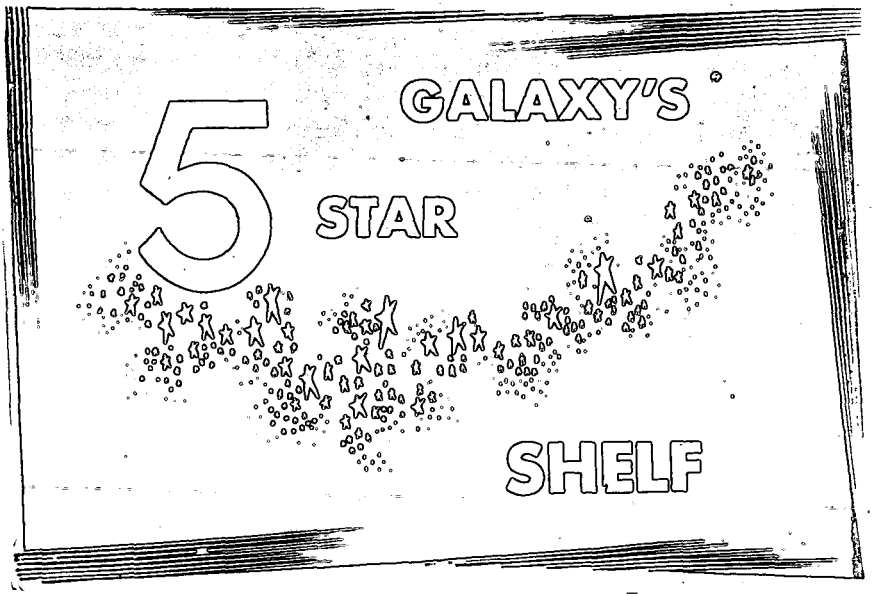

BY GROFF CONKLIN

FARMER IN THE SKY, by Robert A. Heinlein. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950. $2.50, 216 *pages.*

THOUGH conceived as a book for "adolescents," and first published, in a shorter version, in *Boy's Life*, this book is also one of the best of the month's output in science fiction for adults. I don't know what this proves, but I hope it indicates that the so-called adolescent of our time is acquiring a pretty mature and down-to-Earth outlook on science fiction.

It is true that *Farmer in the Sky* underemphasizes philosophical ideology, grandiose concepts of space, and complex scientific jargon; it really is just an adventure story with an unusual amount of realism in its telling. It is *not* childish. When I compare it with the boys' books of a generation or so ago, such as *The Rover Boys* or *Tom Swift,* I am astonished at the advance in quality that has taken place in books for boys.

The fact of the matter is that any lover of realistic and exciting narratives of "different" places will thoroughly enjoy this tale of the attempts of mankind to establish

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settlements on Ganymede, one of Jupiter's moons. It has all the feel of the believable that a good story of adventure in strange places of the known world gives one—plus the bonus tingle of the fact that it is, today, only a dream.

The methods of making Ganymede habitable are *not* described in rich, beautiful pseudo-scientific prose. They are mentioned, sometimes actually described, but never overelaborated: a trick which a good many established science fiction writers might well adopt. And the circumstances that lead to the colonization of Ganymede are described with equal realism and simplicity. The story takes place at a time in the future when Earth itself is drastically overpopulated, and food is in very short supply. The colonists on Ganymede have one thing the Earth inhabitants do not have, which is plenty to eat. On the other hand, they have troubles, too—troubles which *seem* possible when you read them, even though they are foreign now.

Above all, the book is peopled with real and entirely human-scale human beings. There is not a space-jockey among them—unless you consider old Captain Hattie, the crotchety female who operates the ancient rocket ship that is used to ferry passengers and freight from the huge modern Terran space liner (which cannot land on Ganymede) to the satellite's surface, the very model of a future astronaut.

The whole book is a very effective antidote to the complex and often bloody tales of intergalactic and interplanetary wars which seem to be the stock in trade of too many modern science fiction writers. The Lord be praised for this touch of simple sanity in the mad worlds of science fantasy!

A GNOME THERE WAS, by Lewis Padgett. Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1950. $2.50, 276 pages.

A COLLECTION of eleven of the better Kuttner-Padgett short stories from past issues of *Astounding* and other magazines, and consequently a must for everyone who likes top-grade science fiction and fantasy. I have certain reservations, as a matter of personal taste, against the two Hogben opera included, and particularly against the two out-and-out fantasies in the book (*The Gnome,* a "semi"-humorous tale about a man who becomes a gnome, and *Compliments of the Author,* an overlong fiction about cats as familiars and a small-time blackmailer who sold his soul to the devil) but the rest of the tales are top drawer stuff. There are what you need, *The Twonky, The Cure, Mimsy Were the Borogroves* (a masterpiece of subtle and elegant writing about the strangeness of being very young), *Jesting Pilot, Main Check* (with its superb snap at the end) and *This Is The House* (which, though not as

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well known as *The Twonky,* is just as good and just as frightening).

Incidentally, as far as I know, this is the second Kuttner item to see the light of day as a bound book. *Fury,* which was done under the pseudonym of Lawrence O'Donnell in *Astounding,* was published recently in the Grosset & Dunlap Dollar series of science fiction (GALAXY, Nov. 1950). The book is a genuine first, which makes this tale of violence and immortality in the underwater Keeps of Venus especially worth your while—and only $1.

COSMIC ENGINEERS, by Clifford Simak. Gnome Press, 1950. $2.50, 224 *pages.*

THIS well-remembered story of inter-universe adventure has been made into a solid novel from the shorter form in which it originally appeared back in 1939. Falling more or less into the super-impossible school of science fiction of which Donald Wandrei used to be the leader, it has an old-fashioned and somewhat frenetic ring to it which, nevertheless, is rather pleasant. The tale tells how, from a space station on Pluto, a few Earthians, aided by an incredible girl who has been in suspended animation for a thousand years, are able to help avert the collision of our universe with another, a crash which would have been "slightly fatal" to both. A comparison of this colossal concept with the quiet realities of Heinlein's tale of colonizing Ganymede is not favorable to the Simak, but the comparison should be made. It shows how science fiction—even for "adolescents"—has improved since.

The writing in the book is on the immature side, too, as a comparison with Simak's own magnificent *Time Quarry* (GALAXY, Oct.-Dec. 1950) shows. It is very pleasant to see how the author has improved with age—proving that both science fiction and science fiction authors are maturing!

THE SHIP OF ISHTAR, by A. Merritt. Memorial Edition, illustrated by Virgil Finlay. Borden Publishing Co., 1950. $3.50, 309 *pages.*

A VERY handsome volume, with its five superb and sexy Finlays, and an acceptable *In Memoriam* for the Old Master of fantasy.

As for the melodramatic, colorful, corny old plot (the story was first published in 1924), there is no need to describe it here. If you like Merritt, you'll love this example of his weird and fruity imagination; if you don't, you won't care anyhow. I'm one of those who like it, though sometimes I wonder if it's simple hankering for my adolescence, when Merritt was the most wonderful thing that ever happened.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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Two Weeks in August

The humblest events sometimes result from the most grandiose beginnings. You'd never imagine space travel starting this way, for instance!

By FRANK M. ROBINSON

I SUPPOSE there's a guy like McCleary in every office.

Now I'm not a hard man to get along with and it usually takes quite a bit more than overly bright remarks from the office boy to bother me. But try as I might, I could never get along with McCleary. To be as disliked as he was, you have to work at it.

What kind of guy was he? Well, if you came down to the office one day proud as Punch because of something little Johnny or Josephine

Illustrated by ELIZABETH MacINTYRE

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had said, it was a sure cinch that McCleary would horn in with something his little Louie had spouted off that morning. At any rate, when McCleary got through, you felt like taking Johnny to the doctor to find out what made him subnormal.

Or maybe you happened to buy a new Super-eight that week and were bragging about the mileage, the terrific pickup, and how quickly she responded to the wheel. Leave it to McCleary to give a quick rundown on his own car that would make you feel like selling yours for junk at the nearest scrap heap.

Well, you see what I mean.

But by far the worst of it was when vacation time rolled around. You could forgive a guy for topping you about how brainy his kids are, and you might even find it in your heart to forget the terrific bargain he drove to work in. But vacation time was when he'd really get on your nerves. *You* could pack the wife and kids in Old Reliable and roll out to the lake for your two weeks in August. You might even break the bank and spend the two weeks at a poor man's Sun Valley. But no matter where you went, when you came back, you'd have to sit in silence and listen to McCleary's account of his Vacation in the Adirondacks, or his Tramp in the Canadian Wilds, or maybe even the Old French Quarter.

The trouble was he always had the photographs, the ticket stubs, and the souvenirs to prove it. Where he got the money, I'll never know. Sometimes I'd tell the wife about it and she'd sniff and wonder what kind of shabby house they lived in that they could afford all the other things. I never looked him up myself. Tell you the truth, I was afraid I'd find the McClearys lived on Park Avenue.

NOW you look forward to a vacation all year, but particularly during the latter part of July, when, what with the heat and the stuffy office, you begin to feel like a half-done hotdog at a barbecue. I was feeling even worse than usual as I was faced with spending my two weeks in my own backyard, most of my vacation dough having gone to pay the doctor. The only thing I minded was having McCleary find out about it and seeing that phony look of sympathy roll across his fat face while he rambled on about the vacation *he* was going to have.

It was lunch time and we had just finished talking about the latest on television and what was wrong with the Administration and who'd win the pennant when Bob Young brought up the subject of vacations. It turned out he was due for a trip to the Ozarks and Donley was going after wall-eye pike in northern Wisconsin. I could sense McCleary prick up his ears clear across the room.

"How about you, Bill?" Donley asked me. "Got any plans?"

I winked heavily and jerked a

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thumb warningly toward McCleary, making sure McCleary couldn't see the gesture.

"My vacation is really going to be out of the world this time," I said. "Me and the wife are going to Mars. Dry, you know. Even better than Arizona for her sinus."

Even with the wink they were caught off guard for a minute.

"Mars?" Donley said feebly, edging his chair away. "Yeah, sure. Great place. Never been there myself, though."

Young just gaped, then grinned as he caught on. "I understand it's a wonderful spot," he chipped in.

I casually peeled a hard-boiled egg the wife had packed in my lunch bucket and leaned back in my swivel chair. "It's really swell," I said dreamily, but loud enough so McCleary couldn't help but overhear. "Drifting down the Grand Canal at evening, the sun a faint golden disk behind the crystal towers of Marsport . . ." I let my voice drift into a long sigh and reached for Donley's sack of grapes.

About this time McCleary had gnawed his way through a big pastrami sandwich and waddled over. He stood there expectantly, but we carefully ignored him.

"Always wanted to go myself," Donley said in the same tone of voice he would have used to say he'd like to go to California someday. "Pretty expensive, though, isn't it?"

"Expensive?" I raised a studiedly surprised eyebrow. "Oh, I suppose a little, but it's worth it. The wife and I got a roomette on the *Princess of Mars* for $139.50. That's one way, of course."

"Mars!" Young sighed wistfully.

There was a moment of silence, with all three of us paying silent tribute to the ultimate in vacations. McCleary slowly masticated a leaf of lettuce, his initial look of suspicion giving way to half-belief.

"Let's hear some more about it," Young said enthusiastically, suddenly recovering from his reverie.

"Oh, there isn't much more," I said indifferently. "We plan to stay at the Redsands hotel in Marsport —American plan. Take in Marsport, with maybe a side trip to Crystallite. If we have time we might even take a waterway cruise to the North Pole . . ."

I BROKE off and dug Donley in the ribs.

"Man, you never fished until you have a Martian flying fish at the end of the line!" I grabbed a ruler off the desk and began using it as an imaginary rod and reel. "Talk about fight . . . oh, sorry, Mac." My ruler had amputated part of a floppy lettuce leaf that hung from McCleary's sandwich.

I settled down in my chair again and started paying attention to my lunch. "Nothing like it," I added between mouthfuls of liverwurst.

"How about entertainment?" Young winked slyly.

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"Well, you know—the wife will be along," I said. "But some of the places near the Grand Canal—and those Martian Mist Maidens! Brother, if I was unattached . . ."

"There ain't any life on Mars," McCleary said, suspicious again.

All three of us looked at him in shocked silence.

"He says there's no life on Mars!" Donley repeated.

"You ever been there, McCleary?" I asked sarcastically.

"No, but just the same . . ."

"All right," I cut in, "then you don't know whether there is or isn't. So kindly reserve your opinion until you know a little about the subject under discussion."

I TURNED back to Donley and Young.

"Really a wonderful place for your health. Dry, thin air, nice and cool at night. And beautiful! From Marsport you can see low-slung mountains in the distance, dunes of soft, red sand stretching out to them. If I were you, Bob, I'd forget all about the Ozarks and sign up on the rocket."

"There ain't any rockets going to Mars," McCleary said obstinately.

"Isn't," I corrected. "I mean, there is. Besides, McCleary, just because you never heard of something doesn't mean it doesn't exist."

"The government's still working on V-2," McCleary said flatly. "They haven't even reached the moon yet."

I sighed softly, acting disgusted at having to deal with somebody as stupid as McCleary. "Mac, that's the government and besides they're dealing with military rockets. And did you ever hear of the government perfecting something before private industry? Who perfected the telephone, the radio, television? The government? No, private industry, of course! Private industry has always been ahead of the government on everything, including rockets. Get on the stick, Mac."

McCleary started in on his lettuce leaf again, looking very shrewd.

"How come I never heard of it before now?" he asked, springing the clincher argument.

"Look, Mac, this is relatively new. The company's just starting, can't afford to take full-page ads and that sort of thing. Just give 'em time, that's all. Why, a couple of years from now you'll be spending your vacation on Venus or Jupiter or some place like that. From now on California and the Bahamas will be strictly old hat."

McCleary looked half-believing.

"Where'd you get your tickets?"

I waved vaguely in the direction of downtown. "Oh, there must be at least a couple of agencies downtown. Might even be able to find them in the phone book. Look under *Interplanetary Rocket Lines* or something like that. You might have a little difficulty, of course. Like I say, they're not too well advertised."

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McCleary was about to say something more, but then the one o'clock bell rang and we went back to the office grind.

WELL, McCleary didn't say anything more about it the next day, even though we'd throw in a chance comment about Mars every now and then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, but Mac didn't rise to the bait. We gradually forgot about it.

The next couple of weeks came and went and then my two weeks in August. Like I said before, my vacation dough had gone to pay the doctor, so I stayed at home and watered the begonias.

The Monday morning after vacation, we were all back in the office, if anything looking more fagged than we had when we left. When lunch time rolled around, Donley and Young and I piled our lunches on Donley's desk—his desk was near a window on the north side of the building so we could get the breeze—and talked about what we had done during vacation.

McCleary ambled up and like it usually does after McCleary comes around, the conversation just naturally died down. After a two minute silence I finally took the hook.

"Okay, Mac," I said, "I know you're just dying to tell us. Where did you go?"

He almost looked surprised. "To Mars," he said, like he might have said Aunt Minnie's.

The three of us looked blank for a minute and then we caught on. It took us a while to recover from laughing and my sides were still aching when I saw McCleary's face. It definitely had a hurt look on it.

"You don't think I did," he accused us.

"Oh, come off it, McCleary," I said crossly. "A gag's a gag, but it can be carried too far. Where'd you go? California, Oregon, some place like that?"

"I said I went to Mars," McCleary repeated hotly, "and I can prove it!"

"Sure," I said. "Like I can prove the world's flat and it's supported by four elephants standing on a turtle's back like the old Greeks . . ."

I cut off. McCleary had thrown a couple of pasteboards on the desk and I picked them up. The printing on it was like you see on a Pullman ticket. It said something about a roomette, first-class passage on the *Martian Prince,* for $154.75, and there was even a place where they had the tax figured. In two blanks at the top of the ticket, they had it filled out to *E. C. McCleary and wife.* The bottom half was torn off, just like they do with train tickets.

"Very clever," I said, "but you shouldn't have gone to all that trouble to have these printed up."

McCleary scowled and dropped a little bunch of kodachrome slides on the desk. I took one and held it up to the light. It showed Mac and

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his wife mounted on something that looked like a cross between a camel and a zebra. They were at the top of a sand dune and in the distance you could see the towers of a city. The funny thing was the towers looked a little—but not much—like minarets and the sand dunes were colored a beautiful pink.

I passed it on to Donley and Young and started leafing through the rest. They were beautiful slides. McCleary and spouse in front of various structures in a delicately tinted marble and crystal city. McCleary in a pink-and-black boat on a canal that looked as wide as the Mississippi. McCleary standing on a strangely carved sandstone parapet, admiring a sunset caused by a sun looking half as big as ours. And everywhere were the dunes of pink sand.

"Pictures can be faked, Mac," I said.

He looked hurt and got some things out of his desk—a sateen pillow with scenes like those on his snapshots, an urn filled with pink sand, a tiny boat like a gondola, only different, a letter opener made out of peculiar bubbly pink glass. They were all stamped "Souvenir of Mars" and that kind of junk you don't have made up for a gag. I know mass-produced articles when I see them.

"We couldn't afford the first-class tour," McCleary said expansively, "but I figure we can cover that next year." He turned to me puzzledly. "I asked the passenger agent about the *Princess of Mars* and he said he had never heard of the ship. And it's Mars City, not Marsport. Couldn't understand how you made a mistake."

"It was easy," I said weakly. I pointed to the pasteboard ducats. "Where'd you get these, Mac?"

He waved generously in the direction of downtown. "Like you said, there's a couple of agencies downtown. . . ."

YOU know, sometimes I think we misjudged McCleary. It takes a while to get to know a guy like Mac. Maybe his Louie *is* brighter than Johnny, and maybe his chugmobile *is* something terrific.

For the last few years, all on account of Mac, my two weeks in August have really been well spent. Beautiful! Why, from Mars City you can see low-slung mountains in the distance and dunes of soft, red sand stretching out to them. And the sunsets when you're standing on the parapets of that delicate crystal city . . . And, man, fishing in the Grand Canal . . .

How do you get to Mars? There's probably a couple of agencies in your own town. You can look them up in your phone book under "Vacation at the Planets of Pleasure" or something like that. They might be a little difficult to find, though.

You see, they're not very well advertised yet.

—FRANK M. ROBINSON

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TYRANN

By ISAAC ASIMOV

Part 2 of a 3 part serial

SYNOPSIS

BIRON FARRILL, son of an aristocrat of the Nebular Kingdoms, is about to complete his university work on Earth. He is awakened on one of his last nights in the dormitory to find himself locked in with a deadly radiation bomb. He is rescued from this situation by Sander Jonti, a native of the same region of the Galaxy, who states that Biron's father has been arrested and probably executed by the Tyranni, the inhabitants of the planet Tyrann who, fifty years earlier, had conquered all the Nebular Kingdoms.

Jonti apparently also knows that Biron has been asked by his father to obtain a mysterious document from Earth's archives which seems to be of major importance to the success of the conspiracy. Jonti advises Biron to leave Earth before the Tyranni make another attempt to kill him as the representative of an aristocratic family too dangerously popular with their subjects.

Biron leaves for the planet Rhodia under an assumed name. There he expects to see the planet's Director, who is a favorite of the Tyranni overlords and may use his influence with them to have Biron's ancestral land holdings restored to him. On the ship to Rhodia, however, Biron finds that his cabin has been searched and some of his private papers taken. He realizes that his identity must be known and that he is in grave danger. On landing at Rhodia he is turned over to Simok Aratap, the Tyranni Commissioner for that sector of space.

Aratap is aware of Biron's real identity, but releases him in order to be able to discover the true extent of what he feels must be a vast conspiracy, of which Biron and his

Illustrated by JOHN BUNCH

Rebellions logically are led by men who have nothing to lose. But this galactic conspiracy was staffed with noblemen who had nothing to gain and everything to lose if it succeeded!

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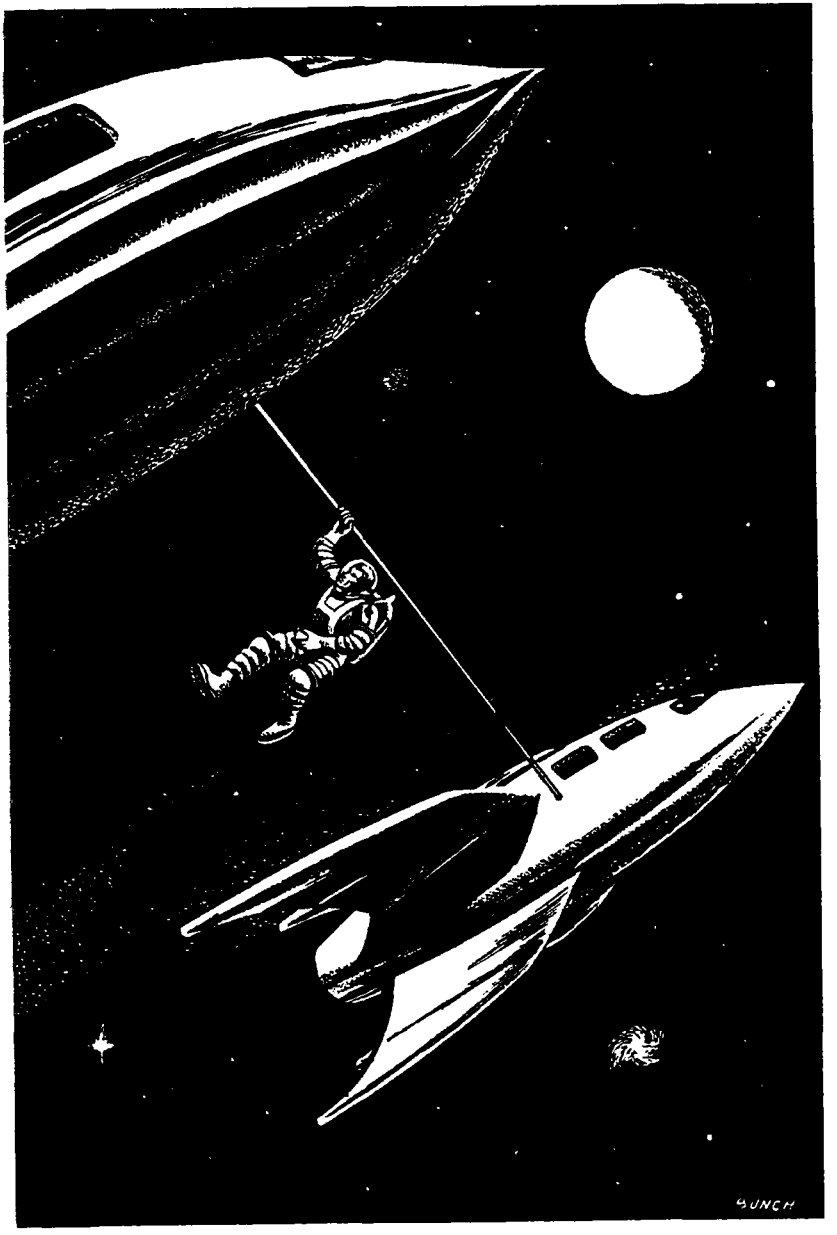

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father were only a small part. For that purpose, Biron is conducted to Hinrik, the Director of Rhodia.

Meanwhile, back on Earth, Sander Jonti continues the search for the important document which Biron had been sent to obtain. He finds it had disappeared from Earth's archives twenty years earlier. He has not the slightest notion of the nature of the document, except that it dates prior to the time of the discovery of space-travel. What Earth of the pre-atomic age can possibly contribute to a conspiracy of the Galactic Era is a mystery.

On Rhodia, Biron meets Hinrik, the weakling Director, who is frightened nearly to idiocy of the Tyranni, and therefore makes a perfect tool for them. He meets Artemisia, the Director's daughter, who is being driven to desperation by an impending marriage of state with an old Tyranni courtier; and Gillbret, the Director's cousin, who dabbles in scientific gadgets although all forms of research among the subject peoples have been forbidden by the Tyranni. Biron reveals his actual identity to them.

In a private conference, Gillbret tells Biron of his own passionate opposition to Tyranni rule and asks Biron to help him and Artemisia escape from the planet. Biron agrees. But meanwhile, Hinrik, convinced that Biron's presence is a trap set for him by the Tyranni, intended to test his loyalty (and in this he is right), orders that Biron be arrested and delivered back to Aratap.

With Gillbret's help, Biron escapes from the two guards sent to arrest him and seeks refuge in Artemisia's room. She conceals him and now faces the company of guards who are ransacking the palace and who wish to search her room. With them is Gillbret.

In Artemisia's dressing room, Biron waits tensely.

PART TWO

CHAPTER IX

And an Overlord's Trousers

ARTEMISIA did not have to feign uneasiness. She spoke to Gillbret, who, with the captain of the guard, was at the door. Half a dozen uniformed men hovered discreetly in the background. She asked, quickly, "Has anything happened to father?"

"No, no," Gillbret reassured her. "Nothing has happened that need concern you at all. Were you asleep?"

"Just about," she replied, "and my girls have been about their own affairs for hours. There was no one to answer but myself and you nearly frightened me to death."

She turned to the captain suddenly, with a stiffening attitude. "What is wanted of me, captain? Quickly, please. This is not the time of day for a proper audience."

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Gillbret broke in, before the other could more than open his mouth, "A most amusing thing, Arta. The young man, whatsisname —you know—has dashed off, breaking two heads on his way. We're hunting him on even terms now. One platoon of soldiers to one fugitive. And here I am myself, hot on the trail, delighting our good captain with my zeal and courage."

Artemisia managed to look completely bewildered.

Under his breath, the captain muttered a monosyllabic imprecation. His lips scarcely moved. He said, "If you please, my Lord, you are not quite plain, and we are delaying matters insufferably. My Lady, the man who calls himself the son of the ex-Rancher of Widemos has been arrested for treason. He has managed to escape and is now at large. We must search the Palace for him, room by room."

Artemisia stepped back, frowning. "Including my room?"

"If your Ladyship permits."

"I do not. I would certainly know if there were a strange man in my room. And the suggestion that I might be having dealings with such a man, or any strange man, at this time of night is highly improper. Please observe due respect for my position, captain."

It worked quite well. The captain could only bow and say, "No such implication was intended, my Lady. Your pardon for annoying you at this time of night. Your statement that you have not seen the fugitive is, of course, sufficient. Under the circumstances, it was necessary to assure ourselves of your safety. He is a dangerous man."

"Surely not so dangerous that he cannot be handled by you and your company."

GILLBRET'S high-pitched voice interposed, "Captain, come, come. While you exchange courtly sentiments with my niece, our man has had time to rifle the armory. I would suggest that you leave a guard at the lady Artemisia's door, so that what remains of her sleep will not be further disturbed. Unless, my dear," and he twinkled his fingers at Artemisia, "you would care to join us."

"I shall satisfy myself," said Artemisia, coldly, "in locking my door and retiring, thank you."

"Pick a large guard," cried Gillbret. "Take that one. A fine uniform our guards have, Artemisia. You can recognize a guard as far as you can see him by his uniform alone."

"My Lord," said the captain, impatiently, "there is no time. You delay matters."

At a gesture from him, a guard fell out of the platoon, saluted Artemisia through the closing door, then the captain. The sound of ordered footsteps fell away in both directions.

Artemisia waited, then slid the door quietly open an inch or two.

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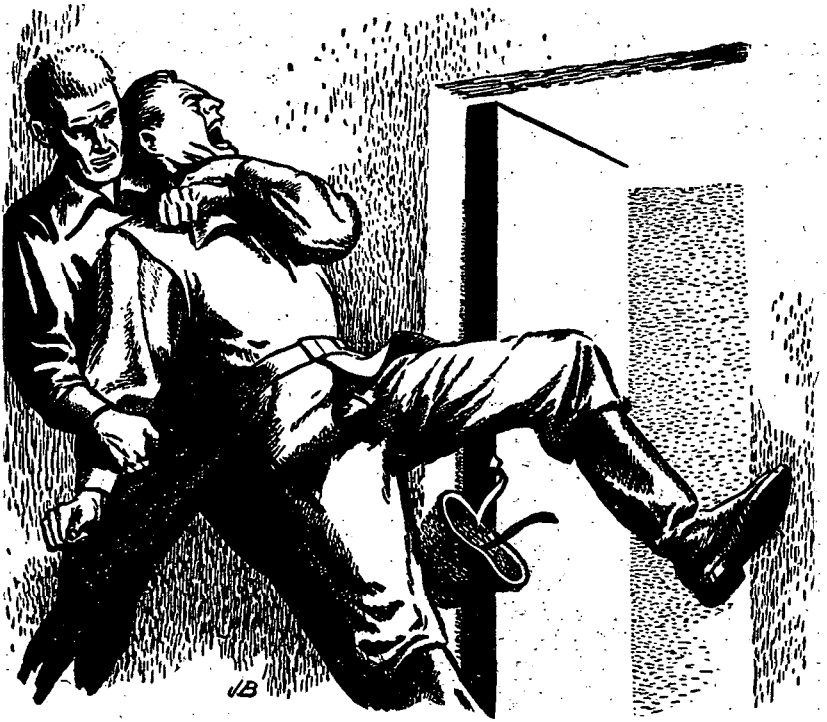

The guard was there, legs apart, back rigid, right hand armed, left hand at his alarm button. He was the guard suggested by Gillbret, a tall one. As tall as Biron of Widemos, though slimmer of shoulders.

It occurred to her, at that moment, that Biron, though young and therefore rather unreasonable in some of his viewpoints, was at least large and well-muscled, which was convenient. It had been foolish of her to snap at him. Quite pleasant-looking, too.

She closed the door, and stepped toward the dressing room.

BIRON tensed as the door slid away again. He held his breath and his fingers stiffened.

Artemisia stared at his neuronic whips, which he had aimed instantly at her. "Be *careful!*"

He puffed out his breath in relief and stuffed each whip into a pocket. They were very uncomfortable there, but he had no proper holsters. He said, "That was just in case it was somebody looking for me."

"Come out. And whisper."

She was still in her night-robe, woven out of a smooth fabric with

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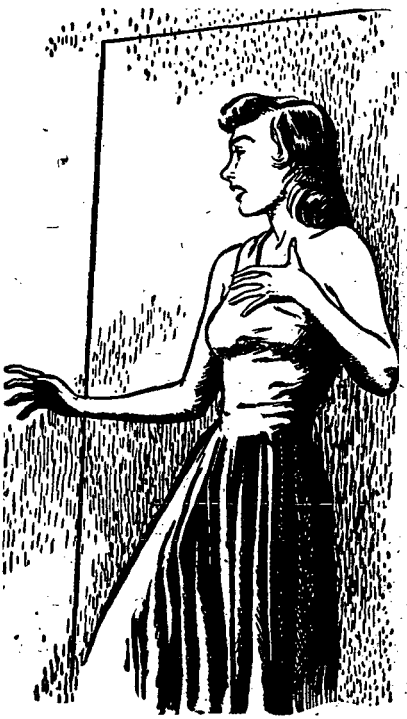

which Biron was unfamiliar, adorned with little tufts of silvery fur, and clinging to the body through some faint static attraction inherent in the material so that neither buttons, clasps, loops, nor seam-fields were necessary. Nor, as a consequence, did it do more than merely faintly dim the outlines of Artemisia's figure.

Biron felt his ears reddening, and liked the sensation very much.

Artemisia waited, then made a little whirling gesture with her forefinger and said, "Do you mind?"

Biron looked up at her face. "What? Oh, I'm sorry."

He turned his back to her and remained stiffly attentive to the faint rustling of the change of outer garments. It did not occur to him to wonder why she had not used the dressing room, or why, better still, she had not changed before opening the door. There are depths in feminine psychology, which, without experience, defy analysis.

She was in black when he turned, a two-piece suit which did not reach below the knee. It had that more substantial appearance that went with clothing meant for the outdoors, rather than for the ballroom.

Biron said, automatically, "Are we leaving, then?"

She shook her head. "You'll have to do your part first. You'll need other clothes yourself. Get to one side of the door, and I'll have the guard in."

"What guard?"

She smiled briefly. "They left a guard at the door, at Uncle Gil's suggestion."

The door to the corridor ran smoothly along its runners an inch or two.

The guard was still there, stiffly immobile.

"Guard," she whispered. "In here, quickly."

There was no reason for a common soldier to hesitate in his obedience to the Director's daughter. He entered the widening door, with a respectful, "At your service, my

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L—" and then his knees buckled under the weight which came down upon his shoulders, while his words were cut off, without even an interrupting squawk, by the forearm which slammed against his larynx.

Artemisia closed the door hurriedly and watched with sensations that amounted almost to nausea. The life in the Palace of the Hinriads was mild almost to decadence, and she had never before seen a man's face congest with blood and his mouth yawn and puff futilely under the influence of asphyxia. She looked away.

Biron bared his teeth with effort as he tightened the circle of bone and muscle about the other's throat. For a minute, the guard's weakening hands ripped futilely at Biron's arm, while his feet groped in aimless kicks. Biron heaved him clear off the floor.

And then the guard's hands fell to his sides, his legs hung loosely and the convulsive and useless heavings of the chest began to subside. Biron lowered him gently to the floor. The guard sprawled out limply as though he were a sack which had been emptied.

"Is he dead?" asked Artemisia, in a horrified whisper.

"I doubt it," said Biron. "It takes four or five minutes of it to kill a man. But he'll be out of things for a while. Do you have anything to tie him up with?"

She shook her head. For the moment, she felt quite helpless.

Biron said, "You must have some Cellite stockings. They would do fine." He had already stripped the guard of weapons and outer clothing, "And I'd like to wash up. In fact, I have to."

IT WAS pleasant to step through the detergent mist in Artemisia's bathroom. It left him perhaps a trifle overscented, but the open air would take care of the fragrance, he hoped. At least, he was clean; and it required merely the momentary passage through the fine, suspended droplets that shot past him forcefully in a warm air stream. No special drying chamber was required, since he stepped out dry as well as clean. They didn't have this on Widemos, or on Earth.

The guard's uniform was a bit tight, and Biron did not like the way the somewhat ugly, conical military cap fit over his brachycephalic head. He stared at his reflection with some dissatisfaction. "How do I look?"

"Quite like a soldier," she said.

He said, "You'll have to carry one of these whips. I can't handle three."

She took it between two fingers and dropped it into her bag which then was suspended from her wide belt by another micro-force, so that her hands remained free.

"We had better go, now," she said. "Don't say a word if we meet anyone; let me do the talking. Your accent isn't right, and it would be

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impossible to talk in my presence unless you were directly addressed, anyway. Remember, you're a common soldier."

The guard on the floor was beginning to wriggle a bit and roll his eyes. His wrists and ankles were securely tied at the small of his back with stockings that had the tensile strength of more than an equal amount of steel. His tongue worked futilely at his gag.

He had been shoved out of the way, so that it was not necessary to step over him to get to the door.

"This way," breathed Artemisia.

AT THE first turning, there was a footstep behind them and a hand came down on Biron's shoulder.

Biron stepped to one side quickly and turned, one hand catching the other's arm, while his other snatched at his whip.

But it was Gillbret, who said, "Easy, man!"

Biron loosened his grip.

Gillbret rubbed his arm. "I've been waiting for you, but that's no reason to break my bones. Let me stare admiringly at you, Farrill. Your clothes seem to have shrunk on you, but not bad; not bad at all. Nobody would look twice at you in that get-up. It's the advantage of a uniform. It's taken for granted that a soldier's uniform holds a soldier and nothing else."

"Uncle Gil," whispered Artemisia, urgently, "don't talk so much. Where are the other guards?"

"Everyone objects to a few words," he said, pettishly. "The other guards are working their way up the tower. They've decided that our friend is on none of the lower levels, so they've just left some men at the main exits and at the ramps, with the general alarm system in operation as well. We can get past it."

"Won't they miss you, sir?" asked Biron.

"Me? Hah! The captain was glad to see me go for all his toe-scraping. They won't look for me, I assure you."

They were speaking in whispers, but now even those died away. A guard stood at the bottom of the ramp, while two others flanked the large, carved double door that led to the open air.

Gillbret called out, "Any word of the escaped prisoner, men?"

"No, my Lord," said the nearest. He clicked his heels together and saluted.

"Well, keep your eyes open." And they walked past them and out, one of the guards at the door carefully neutralizing that section of the alarm as they left.

It was night-time outside. The sky was clear and starry, the ragged mass of the Dark Nebula blotting out the specks of light near the horizon. Palace Central was a dark mass behind them, and the Palace Field was half a mile away.

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But after five minutes of walking along the quiet path, Gillbret grew restless.

"There's something wrong," he said.

Artemisia said, "Uncle Gil, you haven't forgotten to arrange to have the ship ready?"

"Of course not," he snapped at her, as nearly as one could snap in a whisper, "but why is the Field Tower lit up? It should be dark."

He pointed up through the trees, to where the Tower was a honeycomb of white light. Ordinarily, that would indicate business at the Field, ships leaving for space or arriving from it.

Gillbret muttered, "*Nothing* was scheduled for tonight. That was definite."

They saw the answer at a distance, or Gillbret did. He stopped suddenly and spread his arms wide to hold back the others.

"That's all," he said, and giggled almost hysterically. "This time Hinrik has really messed things properly, the idiot. They're here! The Tyranni! Don't you understand? That's Aratap's private armored cruiser."

Biron saw it, gleaming faintly under the lights, standing out among the other undistinguished ships. It was smoother, slimmer, more deadly feline than the Rhodian vessels.

Gillbret said, "The captain *said* a 'personage' was being entertained today, and I paid no attention. There's nothing to do now. We can't fight Tyranni."

"Why not?" Biron demanded, savagely. "Why can't we fight them? They have no reason to suspect trouble and we're armed. Let's take the Commissioner's own ship. Let's leave him with his trousers down."

He stepped forward, out of the relative obscurity of the trees and on to the bare Field. The others followed. There was no reason to hide. They were two members of the royal family and an escorting soldier.

But it was the Tyranni they were fighting now.

SIMOK ARATAP of Tyrann had been impressed the first time he had ever seen the Palace Grounds at Rhodia years earlier, but it had turned out to be only a shell that had impressed him. The interior was nothing but a musty relic. Two generations earlier, Rhodia's legislative chambers had met on these grounds and most of the administrative offices had been quartered there. Palace Central had been the heartbeat of a dozen worlds.

But now the legislative chambers (still existing, for the Khan never interfered with local legalisms) met once a year to ratify the executive orders of the past twelve months. It was only a formality. The Executive Council was still, nominally, in continuous session, but it

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consisted of a dozen men who remained on their estates nine weeks in ten. The various executive bureaus were still active, since one could not govern without them whether the Director or the Khan ruled, but they were now scattered over the planet; made less dependent upon the Director, more conscious of their actual masters, the Tyranni.

Which left the Palace as majestic as it had always been in stone and metal and that only. It housed the Directorial family, a scarcely adequate corps of servants, and an entirely inadequate corps of native guards.

Aratap felt uncomfortable in the palatial shell and was unhappy. It was late, he was tired, his eyes burned so that he longed to remove his contact lenses, and, most of all, he was disappointed.

There was no recognizable pattern of motive and counter-motive. He glanced occasionally at his military aide, but the major was listening to the Director with expressionless stolidity. As for Aratap himself, he paid little attention.

"Widemos's son! Indeed?" he would say, in abstraction. Then later, "And so you arrested him? Quite right!"

But it meant little to him, since events lacked a design. Aratap had a neat and tidy mind which could not bear the thought of individual facts loosely clumped together with no decent arrangement.

Widemos had been a traitor, and Widemos's son had attempted a meeting with the Director of Rhodia. He had attempted it first in secret and when that had failed, such was the urgency, he attempted it openly with his ridiculous story of an assassination plot. Surely that must have been the beginning of a pattern.

And now it fell apart. Hinrik was giving up the boy with indecent haste. He could not even wait the night, it seemed. And that did not fit at all, or else Aratap had not yet learned all the facts.

HE FOCUSED his attention on the Director. Hinrik was senselessly beginning to repeat himself. Aratap felt a twinge of compassion. The man had been made into such a coward that even the Tyranni themselves grew impatient with him. And yet it was the only way. Nothing but fear could insure absolute loyalty.

Widemos had not been afraid, and, despite the fact that his self-interest had been bound at every point with the maintenance of Tyranni rule, he had rebelled. Hinrik *was* afraid and that made the difference.

And because Hinrik was afraid, he sat there, lapsing into incoherence as he struggled to wheedle some gesture of approval. The major would give none, of course, Aratap knew. The man had no imagination. He sighed and wished

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he had none, either. Politics was a filthy business.

So he said, with some air of animation, "I commend your quick decision and your zeal in the service of the Khan. You may be sure he will hear of it."

HINRIK brightened visibly, his relief obvious.

Aratap said, "Have him brought in, then, and let us hear what our cockerel has to say." He suppressed a desire to yawn. He had absolutely no interest in what the "cockerel" had to say.

It was Hinrik's intention at this point to signal for the captain of the guard, but there was no necessity for that. The captain stood in the doorway, unannounced.

"Excellency," he said and strode in without waiting for permission.

Hinrik stared hard at his hand, still inches from the signal, as though wondering whether his intention had somehow developed sufficient force to substitute for the act.

He asked, uncertainly, "What is it, captain?"

The captain said, "Excellency, the prisoner has escaped."

Aratap felt some of the weariness disappear. What was this? "The details, captain!" he ordered, and straightened in his chair.

The captain gave them with a blunt economy of words. He concluded, "I ask your permission, Excellency, to proclaim a general alarm. They are still only minutes away."

"Yes, by all means," stuttered Hinrik, "by all means. A general alarm, indeed. Just the thing. Quickly! Quickly! Commissioner, I cannot understand how it could have happened. Captain, put every man to work. There will be an investigation, Commissioner. If necessary, every man on the guards will be broken. Broken! Broken!"

He repeated the word in near-hysteria, but the captain remained standing. It was obvious that he had more to say.

Aratap said, "Why do you wait?"

"May I speak to your Excellency in private?" asked the captain, abruptly.

Hinrik cast a quick, frightened look at the bland, unperturbed Commissioner. He mustered a feeble indignation. "There are no secrets from the soldiers of the Khan, our friends, our—"

"Say your say, captain," interposed Aratap, gently.

The captain brought his heels together sharply. "Since I am ordered to speak, your Excellency, I regret to inform you that my lady Artemisia and my lord Gillbret accompany the prisoner in his escape."

"He dared to kidnap them?" Hinrik was on his feet. "And my guards allowed it?"

"They were not kidnaped, Excellency. They accompany him voluntarily."

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"How do you know?" Aratap was delighted, and thoroughly awake. It formed a pattern now, after all. A better pattern than he could have anticipated.

The captain said, "We have the testimony of the guard they overpowered, and the guards who, unwittingly, allowed them to leave the building." He hesitated, then added grimly, "When I interviewed my lady Artemisia at the door of her private chambers, she told me she had been on the point of sleep. It was only later that I realized that when she told me that, her face was elaborately made up. When I returned, it was too late. I accept the blame for the mismanagement of this affair. After tonight, I will request your Excellency to accept my resignation, but, first, have I still your permission to sound the general alarm? Without your authority, I could not interfere with members of the royal family."

But Hinrik was swaying on his feet and could only stare at him vacantly.

Aratap said, "Captain, you would do better to look to the health of your Director. I would suggest you call his physician."

"The general alarm," repeated the captain.

"There will be no general alarm," said Aratap. "Do you understand me? No general alarm! No recapture of the prisoner! The incident is closed! Return your men to their quarters and ordinary duties and look to your Director. —Come, major."

THE Tyrannian major spoke tensely once they had left the mass of Palace Central behind them.

"Aratap," he said, "I presume you know what you're doing. I kept my mouth shut in there on the basis of that presumption."

"Thank you, major." Aratap liked the night air of a planet full of green and growing things. Tyrann was more beautiful in its way, but it was a terrible beauty of arid rocks and mountains.

He went on, "You cannot handle Hinrik, Major Andros. In your hands, he would wilt and break. He is useful, but requires gentle treatment if he is to remain so."

The major brushed that aside. "I'm not referring to that. Why not the general alarm? Don't you want them?"

"Do you?" Aratap stopped. "Let us sit here for a moment, Andros. A bench on a pathway along a lawn. What more beautiful and what place is safer from spy beams? Why do you want the young man, major?"

"Why do I want any traitor and conspirator?"

"Why do you, indeed, if you only catch a few tools while leaving the source of the poison untouched? Whom would you have? A cub, a silly girl, a senile idiot."

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There was the faint splashing of an artificial waterfall nearby. A small one, but decorative. Now that was a real wonder to Aratap. Imagine water, spilling out, running to waste, pouring down the rocks and along the ground. He had never educated himself out of a prim indignation over it.

"AS IT is," said the major, "we have nothing."

"We have a pattern. When the young man first arrived, we connected him with Hinrik and that bothered us because Hinrik is—what he is. But it was the best we could do. Now we see it was not Hinrik at all; that Hinrik was a misdirection. It was Hinrik's daughter and cousin he was after and that makes more sense."

"Why didn't he call us sooner? He waited for the middle of the night."

"Because he is the tool of whoever is the first to reach him, and Gillbret, I am sure, suggested this night meeting as a sign of great zeal on his part."

"You mean we were called here on purpose? To *witness* their escape?"

"No, not for that reason. Ask yourself. Where do these people intend going?"

The major shrugged. "Rhodia is big."

"Yes, if it were the young Farrill alone who was concerned. But where on Rhodia would two members of the royal family go unrecognized? Particularly the girl."

"They would have to leave the planet then."

"And from where? They can reach the Palace Field in a fifteen-minute walk. Now do you see the purpose of our being here?"

The major said, "*Our* ship?"

"Of course. A Tyrannian ship would seem ideal to them. Otherwise, they would have to choose among freighters. Farrill has been educated on Earth, and, I'm sure, can fly a cruiser."

"Now there's a point," the major agreed. "Why do we allow the nobility to send out their sons in all directions? What business has a subject to know more about travel than will suffice him for local trade? We raise soldiers against us."

"Nevertheless,"— said Aratap, with polite indifference, "at the moment, Farrill has a foreign education and let us take that into account objectively, without growing angry about it. The fact remains that I am completely certain they have taken our cruiser."

"I can't believe it."

"You have your wrist-caller. Make contact with the ship, if you can."

The major tried, futilely.

Aratap said, "Try the Field Tower."

The major did so, and the small voice came out of the tiny receiver, in minute agitation. "But, Excel-

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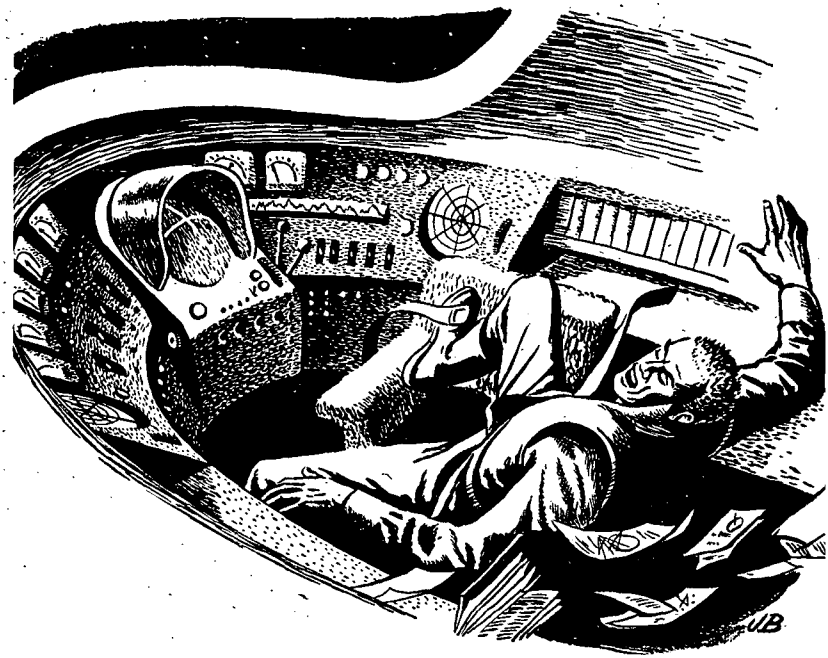

lency, I don't understand. There is some mistake. Your pilot took off ten minutes ago."

Aratap was smiling. "You see? Work out the pattern and each little event becomes inevitable. And now do you fully understand the consequences?"

THE major did. He slapped his thigh, and laughed briefly. "Of course!"

"Well," said Aratap, "they couldn't know, of course, but they have ruined themselves. Had they been satisfied with the clumsiest Rhodian freighter on the field, they would surely have escaped and (what's the expression?) I would have been caught with my trousers down this night. As it is, my trousers are firmly belted and nothing can save the three of *them*. And when I pluck them back, in my own good time" —he emphasized the words with satisfaction— "I will have the rest of the conspiracy in my hands as well."

He sighed and found himself beginning to feel sleepy once more, "Well, we have been lucky, and now there is no hurry. Call Central Base and have them send another ship after us."

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CHAPTER X

Maybe!

BIRON FARRILL'S training in spationautics back at Earth had been largely academic. There had been the university courses in the various phases of spatial engineering which, though half a semester was spent on the theory of the hyperatomic motor, offered little when it came to the actual manipulation of ships in space. The best and most skilled pilots learned their art in practice and not in schoolrooms.

He had managed to take off without actual accident, though that was more luck than design. The *Remorseless* answered the controls far more quickly than Biron had anticipated. He had manipulated several ships on Earth out into space and back to the planet, but those had been aged and sedate models, maintained for the use of students. They had been gentle, and very, very tired, and had lifted with an effort and spiraled slowly upward through the atmosphere and into space.

The *Remorseless,* on the other hand, had lifted effortlessly, springing upward and whistling through the air, so that Biron had fallen backward out of his chair and all but dislocated his shoulder. Artemisia and Gillbret, with the greater caution of the inexperienced, had strapped themselves in, and were bruised against the padded webbing. The Tyrannian prisoner had lain pressed against the wall, tearing at his bonds and cursing in a monotone.

Biron had risen shakily to his feet, kicked the Tyrannian into a brooding silence and made his way along the wall-rail, hand over hand against the acceleration, back to his seat. Forward blasts of power quivered the ship and reduced the rate of increasing velocity to a bearable pressure.

They were in the upper reaches of the Rhodian atmosphere by then. The sky was a deep violet and the hull of the ship was hot with air friction, so that warmth could be felt within.

It took hours thereafter to set the ship into an orbit about Rhodia. Biron could find no way of readily calculating the velocity necessary to just overcome Rhodia's gravity. He had to work it by hit and miss, varying the velocity with puffs of power forward and backward, watching the massometer, which indicated their distance from the planet's surface by measuring the intensity of the gravitational field. Fortunately the massometer was already calibrated for Rhodia's mass and radius. Without considerable experimentation, Biron could not have adjusted the calibration himself.

Eventually, the massometer held steady and over a period of two hours showed no appreciable drift.

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Biron allowed himself to relax, and the others climbed out of their belts.

ARTEMISIA said, "You don't have a very light touch, my lord Rancher."

"I'm flying by touch, my Lady," Biron replied, curtly. "If you can do better, you're welcome to try, but only after I myself disembark."

"Quiet, quiet," said Gillbret. "The ship is too cramped for pettishness, and, in addition, since we *are* to be crushed into an inconvenient familiarity in this leaping prison pen, I suggest we discard the many 'lords' and 'ladies' which will otherwise encrust our conversation. I am Gillbret, you are Biron, she is Artemisia. I suggest we memorize those terms of address, or any variation we care to use. And as for piloting the ship, why not use the help of our Tyrannian friend here?"

The Tyrannian glared, and Biron said, "No. There is no way we could trust him. And my own piloting will improve as I get the hang of this ship. I haven't cracked you up yet, have I?"

His shoulder hurt still as a result of the first lurch and, as usual, pain made him peevish.

"Well," said Gillbret, "what *do* we do with him?"

"I don't like to kill him in cold blood," said Biron, "and that won't help us. It would just make the Tyranni doubly excited. Killing one of the master race is really the unforgivable sin."

"But what is the alternative?"

"We'll land him."

"All right. Where?"

"On Rhodia."

"What?"

"It's the one place they won't be looking for us. Besides, we've got to go down pretty soon, anyway."

"Why?"

"Look, this is the Commissioner's ship, and he's been using it for hopping about the surface of the planet. It wouldn't be provisioned for space voyages. Before we go anywhere, we'll have to take complete inventory aboard ship, and at least make sure that we have enough food and water."

Artemisia was nodding vigorously. "That's right. I wouldn't have thought of that myself. Very clever, Biron."

Biron made a deprecating gesture, but warmed with pleasure, nevertheless. It was the first time she had used his first name. She could be quite pleasant when she tried.

Gillbret said, "But he'll radio our whereabouts instantly."

"I don't think so," said Biron. "In the first place, Rhodia has its desolate areas, I imagine. We don't have to drop him into the business section of a city, or into the middle of one of the Tyranni garrisons. Besides, he may not be so anxious to contact his superiors as you might think. —Say, private, what would

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happen to a soldier who allowed the Commissioner of the Khan to have his private cruiser stolen from him?"

The prisoner did not answer, but his lip-line became pale.

Biron would not have wanted to be in the soldier's place. To be sure, he could scarcely be blamed. There was no reason why he should have suspected trouble resulting from mere politeness to members of the Rhodian royal family. Sticking to the letter of the Tyranni military code, he had refused to allow them aboard ship without the permission of his commanding officer. If the Director himself had demanded permission to enter, he would have to deny it. But in the meantime, they had closed in upon him, and by the time he realized he should have followed the military code still more closely and had his weapon ready, it was too late. A neuronic whip was practically touching his chest.

Nor had he given in tamely, even then. It had taken a whip-blast at his chest to stop him. And even so, he could face only courtmartial and conviction. No one doubted that, least of all the soldier.

THEY had landed two days later at the outskirts of the city of Southwark. It had been chosen deliberately because it lay far from the main centers of Rhodian population. The Tyrannian soldier had been strapped into a repulsion unit and allowed to flutter downward some fifty miles from the nearest sizable town.

The landing, on an empty beach, was only mildly jerky, and Biron, as the one least likely to be recognized, made the necessary purchases. Such Rhodian currency as Gillbret had had the presence of mind to bring with him had scarcely sufficed for elementary needs, since much of it went for a little bi-wheel and tow-cart, on which Biron could carry the supplies away piecemeal.

"You might have stretched the money further," said Artemisia, "if you hadn't wasted so much of it on the Tyranni mush you bought."

"There was nothing else to do," said Biron, hotly. "It may be Tyranni mush to you, but it's a well-balanced food, and will see us through better than anything else I could have gotten."

He was annoyed. It had been stevedore's work, getting all that stuff out of the city and then aboard ship. And it had meant a considerable risk, buying it at one of the Tyranni-run commissaries in the city. He had expected appreciation, not carping.

There was no alternative, actually. The Tyranni forces had evolved an entire technique of supply adapted entirely to the fact that they used tiny ships. They couldn't afford the huge storage spaces of other fleets, which were stacked with the carcasses of whole animals, neatly

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hung in rows. They had to develop a standard food-concentrate containing what was necessary in the way of calories and food-factors and let it go at that. It took up only one-twentieth of the space that an equivalent supply of natural animal food would take, and it could be piled up in the low-temperature storeroom like packaged bricks.

"WELL, it tastes awful," said Artemisia.

"You'll get used to it," retorted Biron, mimicking her petulance, so that she flushed and turned away angrily.

What was bothering her, Biron knew, was simply the lack of space and all that accompanied the lack. It wasn't just a question of using a monotonous food-stock because, in that way, more calories could be packed to the cubic inch. It was that there were no separate sleeping rooms, for instance. There were the engine rooms and the control room, which took up most of the ship's space. (After all, Biron thought, this is a warship, not a pleasure yacht.) Then there were the storeroom, and one small cabin, with two tiers of three bunks on either side. The plumbing was located in a little niche just outside the cabin.

It meant crowding; it meant a complete absence of privacy; and it meant that Artemisia would have to adjust herself to the fact that there were no women's clothes aboard, no mirrors, no washing facilities.

Well, she would have to get used to it. Biron felt that he had done enough for her, gone sufficiently out of his way. Why couldn't she be pleasant about it, and smile once in a while? She had a nice smile, and he had to admit she wasn't bad outside her temper. But, oh, that temper!

Well, why waste his time thinking about her?

The water situation was the worst. Tyrann was a desert planet in the first place, where water was at a premium and men knew its value, so none was included on board ship for washing purposes. Soldiers could wash themselves and their personal effects once they had landed on a planet. During trips, a little grime and sweat would not hurt them. Even for drinking purposes, water was barely sufficient for the longer trips. After all, water could be neither concentrated nor dehydrated, but had to be carried in bulk, the problem being aggravated by the fact that the water content of the food concentrates was quite low.

There were distilling devices to re-use water lost by the body, but Biron, when he realized their function, felt squeamish and arranged for the disposal of waste products without attempt at water recovery. Chemically, it was a sensible procedure, but one has to be educated into that sort of thing.

The second takeoff was, comparatively, a model of smooth-

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ness, and Biron spent time playing with the controls afterward. The control board resembled only in the dimmest fashion those of the ships he had handled on Earth. It had been compressed and compacted frightfully. As Biron puzzled out the action of a contact or the purpose of a dial, he wrote minute directions on paper and pasted them appropriately on the board.

Gillbret entered the pilot room.

Biron looked over his shoulder. "Artemisia's in the cabin, I suppose?"

"There isn't any place else she could be and stay inside the ship."

Biron said, "When you see her, tell her I'll make up a bunk here in the pilot room. I'd advise you to do the same, and let her have the cabin to herself." He muttered, "It wasn't bad enough—we had to bring along a damn girl."

"You have your moments, too, Biron," said Gillbret. "You'll have to remember the sort of life she's used to."

"All right, I do remember it, and so what? What sort of life do you think I'm used to? I wasn't born in the mine fields of some asteroidal belt, you know. I was born on the biggest ranch of Nephelos. But if you're caught in a situation, you've got to make the best of it. Damn it, I can't stretch the hull of the ship. It will hold just so much food and water, and I can't do anything about the fact that there isn't any shower. She picks on me as if I personally manufactured this ship." It was a relief to shout at Gillbret. It was a relief to shout at anybody.

The door opened again, and Artemisia stood there. She said, freezingly, "I would refrain, Mr. Farrill, from shouting if I were you. You can be distinctly heard all over the ship."

"That," said Biron, "does not bother me. And if the ship bothers *you*, just remember that if your father hadn't tried to kill me off and marry you off, neither one of us would be here."

"Don't you criticize my father."

"I'll criticize anyone I please."

Gillbret put his hands over his ears. *"Please!"*

IT BROUGHT a brief halt. Gillbret said, "Shall we discuss the matter of our destination now? It's obvious at this point that the sooner we're somewhere else and get out of this ship, the more comfortable we'll be."

"I agree with you there, Gil," said Biron. "Just let's go somewhere where I don't have to listen to her clacking. Talk about women on spaceships!"

Artemisia ignored him and addressed Gillbret exclusively. "Why don't we get out of the Nebular area altogether?"

"I don't know about you," said Biron, at once, "but I've got to get my Ranch back and do a little something about my father's murder. I'll stay in the Kingdoms, thanks."

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"I did not mean," said Artemisia, "that we were to leave forever; only till the worst of the search was over. I don't see what you intend doing about your Ranch, anyway. You can't get it back unless the Tyranni Empire is broken to pieces, and I can't see you doing that."

"You never mind what I intend doing. It's my business."

"Might I make a suggestion?" asked Gillbret, mildly. He took silence for consent, and went on, "Then suppose I tell you where we ought to go, and exactly what we ought to do to help break the Empire to pieces, just as Arta said."

"Oh? How do you propose doing that?" said Biron.

Gillbret smiled. "My dear boy, you're taking a very amusing attitude. Don't you trust me? You look at me as though you think that any enterprise I might be interested in was bound to be a foolish one. I got you out of the Palace, you know."

"I know that. I'm perfectly willing to listen to you."

"Do so then. I've been waiting for over twenty years for my chance to get away from them. If I had been a private citizen, I could have done it long since; but, through the curse of birth, I've been in the public eye. And yet if it hadn't been for the fact that I was born a Hinriad, I would not have attended the coronation of the present Khan of Tyrann, and in that case I would never have stumbled on the secret which will someday destroy that same Khan."

"Go on," said Biron.

"The trip from Rhodia to Tyrann was by Tyranni warship, of course, as was the trip back. A ship like this, I might say, but rather larger. The trip there was uneventful. The stay on Tyrann had its points of amusement, but, for our purposes now, was likewise uneventful. On the trip back, however, a meteor hit us."

"What?"

GILLBRET held up a hand. "I know it's an unlikely accident. The incidence of meteors in space, especially in interstellar space, is low enough to make the chances of collision with a ship completely insignificant, but it does happen, as you know. And it did happen in this case. Of course any meteor that does hit, even when it is the size of a pinhead, as most of them are, can penetrate the hull of any but the most heavily armored ship."

"I know," said Biron. "It's a question of their momentum, which is a product of their mass and velocity. The velocity more than makes up for their lack of mass." He recited it glumly, like a school lesson, and caught himself watching Artemisia furtively.

She had seated herself to listen to Gillbret, and she was so close that they were almost touching. It occurred to Biron that her profile

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was beautiful as she sat there, even if her hair was becoming a little bedraggled. She wasn't wearing her little jacket, and the fluffy whiteness of her blouse was still smooth and unwrinkled after forty-eight hours. He wondered how she managed to do that.

The trip, he decided, could be quite wonderful if she would only learn to behave herself. The trouble was that no one had ever controlled her properly, that was all. Certainly not her father. She'd become too used to having her own way. If she'd been born a commoner, she would have been a very lovely creature.

HE WAS just beginning to slip into a daydream in which *he* controlled her properly and brought her to a state of proper appreciation of himself, when she turned her head and met his eye calmly. Biron looked away and fastened his attention instantly on Gillbret. He had missed a few sentences.

"I haven't the slightest idea why the ship's screen had failed. It was just one of those things to which no one will ever know the answer, but it had failed. Anyway, the meteor struck amidships. It was pebble-size and piercing the hull slowed it just sufficiently so that it couldn't blaze its way out again through the other side. If it had done that, there would have been little harm to it, since the hull could be temporarily patched in no time.

"As it was, however, it plunged into the control room, ricocheted off the far wall and slammed back and forth till it came to a halt. It couldn't have taken more than a fraction of a minute to do so, but at an original velocity of a hundred miles a minute, it must have criss-crossed the room a hundred times. Both crewmen were cut to pieces, and I escaped only because I was in the cabin at the time.

"I heard the thin clang of the meteor when it originally penetrated the hull, then the click-clack of its bouncing and the terrifying short screams of the two crew men. When I jumped into the control room, there was only the blood everywhere and the torn flesh. The things that happened next I remember only vaguely, although for years I lived it over step by step in my nightmares.

"The cold sound of escaping air led me to the meteor hole. I slapped a disk of metal over it and air pressure made a decent seal of it. I found the little battered space-pebble on the floor. It was warm to the touch, but I hit it with a spanner and split it in two. The exposed interior frosted over instantly. It was still at the temperature of space.

"I tied a cord to the wrist of each corpse and then fastened each cord to a towing magnet. I dumped them through the airlock, heard the magnets clank against the hold, and knew that the hard-frozen bodies would follow the ship now where-

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ever it went. You see, I knew I would need the evidence of their bodies to show that it had been the meteor that had killed them and not I, once we returned to Rhodia.

"But how was I to return? I was quite helpless. There was no way *I* could run the ship, and there was nothing I dared try there in the depths of interstellar space. I didn't even know how to use the subetheric communication system, so that I couldn't SOS. I could only let the ship travel on its own course."

"But you couldn't very well do that, could you?" Biron asked. He wondered if Gillbret were inventing this, either out of simple romantic imaginings or for some severely practical reason of his own. "What about the Jumps through hyperspace? You must have managed those, or you wouldn't be here."

"A Tyranni ship," said Gillbret, "once the controls are properly set, will make any number of Jumps quite automatically."

Biron stared his disbelief. Did Gillbret take him for a fool? "You're making that up," he said.

"I am not. It's one of the damned military advances which won their wars for them. They didn't defeat fifty planetary systems, outnumbering Tyrann by hundreds of times in population and resources, just by playing mumbledy-peg, you know. Sure, they tackled us one at a time, and utilized our traitors very skillfully, but they had a definite military edge as well. Everyone knows that their tactics were superior to ours, and part of that was due to the automatic Jump. It meant a great increase in the maneuverability of their ships and made possible much more elaborate battle plans than any we could set up.

"It's one of their best-kept secrets, this technique of theirs. I never learned it until I was trapped alone on the *Bloodsucker* (the Tyranni have the most annoying custom of naming their ships unpleasantly, though I suppose it's good psychology) and watched it happen. I *watched* it make the Jumps without a hand on the controls."

"And you mean to say that this ship can do that, too?"

"I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised."

BIRON turned to the control board. There were still dozens of contacts he had not determined the slightest use for. Well, later!

He turned to Gillbret again. "And the ship took you home?"

"No, it didn't. When that meteor wove its pattern through the control room, it didn't leave the board untouched. It would have been a most amusing coincidence if it had. Dials were smashed, the casing battered and dented. There was no way of telling how the previous setting of the controls had been altered, but it must have been

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somehow, because it never took me back to Rhodia.

"Eventually, of course, it began deceleration, and I knew the trip was theoretically over. I couldn't tell where I was, but I managed to maneuver the visiplate so that I could tell there was a planet close enough to show a disc in the ship telescope. It was blind luck, because the disc was increasing in size. The ship was heading for the planet.

"Oh, not directly. That would be too impossible to hope for. If I had just drifted, the ship would have missed the planet by a million miles, at least, but at that distance I could use ordinary etheric radio. I knew how to do that. It was after this was all over that I began educating myself in electronics. I made up my mind that I would never be quite so helpless again. Being helpless is one of the things that isn't altogether amusing."

BIRON prompted, "So you used the radio."

"Exactly, and they came and got me."

"Who?"

"The men of the planet. It was inhabited."

"Well, the luck piles up. What planet was it?"

"I don't know."

"You mean they didn't tell you?"

"Amusing, isn't it? They didn't. But it was somewhere among the Nebular Kingdoms!"

"How did you know that?"

"Because they knew the ship I was in was a Tyranni vessel. They knew that by sight, and almost blasted it before I could convince them I was the only one on board alive."

Biron put his large hands on his knees and kneaded them. "Now hold on and pull back. I don't understand this. If they knew it was a Tyranni vessel and intending blasting it, isn't that the best proof that the world was *not* in the Nebular Kingdoms? Anywhere in the Galaxy but there."

"*No,* by the Galaxy." Gillbret's eyes were shining, and his voice climbed in enthusiasm. "It *was* in the Kingdoms. They took me to the surface and what a world it was! There were men there from all over the Kingdoms. I could tell by the accents. And *they* had no fear of the Tyranni. The place was an arsenal. You couldn't tell from space. It might externally have been a rundown farming world, but the real life of the planet was underground. Somewhere in the Kingdoms, my boy, *somewhere,* there is that planet still and it is *not* afraid of the Tyranni and it is going to destroy the Tyranni as it would have destroyed the ship I was on then, if the crew men had been still alive."

Biron felt his heart bound.

For a moment, he wanted desperately to believe.

After all, maybe.

Maybe!

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CHAPTER XI

And Maybe Not!

BIRON said, "How did you learn all this about its being an arsenal? How long did you stay? What did you see?"

Gillbret grew impatient. "It wasn't exactly what I saw at all. They didn't conduct me on any tours, or anything like that." He forced himself to relax. "Well, look, this is what happened. By the time they got me off the ship, I was in more or less of a bad state. I had been too frightened to eat much (it's a terrible thing, being marooned in space) and I must have looked worse than I really was.

"I identified myself, more or less, and they took me underground. With the ship, of course. I suppose they were more interested in the ship than in myself. It gave them a chance to study Tyranni spatio-engineering. They took me to what must have been a hospital."

"But what did you see, uncle?" asked Artemisia.

Biron interrupted, "Hasn't he ever told *you* this before?"

Artemisia said, "No."

And Gillbret added, "I've never told anyone till now. I was taken to a hospital, as I said. I passed research laboratories in that hospital that must have been better than anything we have on Rhodia. On the way to the hospital I passed factories in which some sort of metalwork was going on. The ships that had captured me were certainly like none I've ever heard about.

"It was all so apparent to me at the time that I have never questioned it in the years since. I think of it as my 'rebellion world,' and I know that someday swarms of ships will leave it to attack the Tyranni, and that the subject worlds will be called upon to rally round the rebel leaders. From year to year I've waited for it to happen. Each new year I've thought to myself: This may be the one. And each time, I half hoped it wouldn't be, because I was longing to get away first, to join them so that I might be part of the great attack. I didn't want them to start without me."

He laughed shakily. "I suppose it would have amused most people to know what was going on in my mind. In *my* mind. Nobody thought much of me, you know."

Biron said, "All this happened over twenty years ago, and they haven't attacked? There's been no sign of them? No strange ships have been reported? No incidents? And you still think—"

Gillbret fired at him, "Yes, I do. Twenty years isn't too long to organize a rebellion against a planet that rules fifty systems. I was there just at the beginning of the rebellion. I know that, too. Slowly, since then, they must have been honeycombing the planet with their underground preparations, developing

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newer ships and weapons, training more men, organizing the attack.

"It's only in the video-thrillers that men spring to arms at a moment's notice, that a new weapon is needed one day, invented the next, mass-produced the third and used the fourth. These things take time, Biron, and the men of the 'rebellion world' must know they will have to be completely ready before beginning. They won't be able to strike twice.

"And what do you call 'incidents?' Tyranni ships have disappeared and never been found. Space is big, you might say, and they might simply be lost, but what if they were captured by the rebels? There was the case of the *Tireless* two years back. It reported a strange object close enough to stimulate the massometer, and then was never heard of again. It could have been a meteor, but *was* it?"

"The search lasted months. They never found it. *I* think the rebels have it. The *Tireless* was a new ship, an experimental model. It would be just what they would want."

BIRON said, "Once having landed there, why didn't you stay?"

"Don't you suppose I wanted to? I had no chance. I listened to them when they thought I was unconscious, and I learned a bit more then. They were just starting at that time. They couldn't afford to be found out then. They knew I was Gillbret oth Hinriad. There was enough identification on the ship, even if I hadn't told them myself, which I had. They knew that if I didn't return to Rhodia there would be a full-scale search that would not readily come to a halt.

"They couldn't risk such a search, so they had to see to it that I was returned to Rhodia. And that's where they took me."

"What?" cried Biron. "But that must have been an even greater risk. How did they do that?"

"I don't know." Gillbret passed his thin fingers through his graying hair, and his eyes seemed to be probing uselessly into the backward stretches of his memory. "They anesthetized me, I suppose. That part all blanks out. Past a certain point there is nothing. I can only remember that I opened my eyes and was back in the *Bloodsucker*. I was in space, just off Rhodia."

"The two dead crewmen were still attached by the tow magnets? They hadn't been removed on the 'rebellion world?' " asked Biron.

"They were still there."

"Was there any evidence at all to indicate that you had been on the 'rebellion world?' "

"None, except for what I remembered."

"How did you know you were off Rhodia?"

"I didn't. I knew I was near a planet; the massometer said so. I used the radio again, and this time

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it was Rhodian ships that came for me. I told my story to the Tyrannian Commissioner of that day, with appropriate modifications. I made no mention of the 'rebellion world,' of course. And I said the meteor had hit just after the last Jump. I didn't want them to think I knew that a Tyrannian ship could make the Jumps automatically."

"Do you think the 'rebellion world' found out that little fact? Did you tell them?"

"I didn't tell them. I had no chance. I wasn't there long enough. Conscious, that is. But I don't know how long I was unconscious and what they managed to find out for themselves."

Biron stared at the visiplate. Judging from the rigidity of the picture it presented, the ship they were on might have been nailed in space. The *Remorseless* was traveling at the rate of ten thousand miles an hour, but that was nothing to the immense distances of space. The stars were hard, bright and motionless. They had a hypnotic quality about them.

He said, "Then where are we going? I take it you still don't know where the 'rebellion world' is?"

"I don't. But I have an idea who would be in charge. I am almost sure I know who would be in charge." Gillbret was eager about it.

"Who?"

"The Autarch of Lingane."

"Lingane?" Biron frowned. He had heard the name some time back, it seemed to him, but he had forgotten the connection. "Why he?"

"Lingane was the last Kingdom captured by the Tyranni. It is not, shall we say, as pacified as the rest. Doesn't that make sense?"

"As far as it goes. But how far is that?"

"If you want another reason, there is your father."

"My father?" For a moment, Biron forgot that his father was dead. He saw him standing before his mind's eyes, large and alive, but then he remembered and there was that same cold wrench inside him. "How does my father come into this?"

"He was at court six months ago. I gained certain notions as to what he wanted. Some of his talks with my cousin, Hinrik, I overheard."

"Oh, uncle," said Artemisia, impatiently.

"My dear?"

"You had no right to eavesdrop on father's private discussions."

GILLBRET shrugged. "Of course not, but it was amusing, and useful as well."

Biron interrupted, "Now wait. You say it was six months ago that my father was at Rhodia?" He felt excitement mount.

"Yes."

"Tell me. While there, did he have access to the Director's collection of Primitivism? You told me

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once that the Director had a large library of matters concerning Earth."

"I imagine so. The library is quite famous and it is usually made available to distinguished visitors, if they're interested. They usually aren't, but your father was. Yes, I remember that very well. He spent nearly a day there."

That checked. It had been half a year ago that his father had first asked his help. Biron said, "You yourself know the library well, I imagine."

"Of course."

"Is there anything in the library that would suggest that there exists a document on Earth of great military value?"

Gillbret was blank of face; obviously, blank of mind.

Biron said, "Somewhere in the last centuries of prehistoric Earth there must have been such a document. I can only tell you that my father thought it to be the most valuable single item in the Galaxy, and the deadliest. I was to have gotten it for him, but I left Earth before I could, and in any case," his voice faltered, "he died too soon."

But Gillbret was still blank. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"My father mentioned it to me first six months ago. He must have learned of it in the library on Rhodia. If you've been through it yourself, can't you tell me what it was he must have learned?"

But Gillbret could only shake his head.

Biron said, "Well, continue with your story."

"They spoke of the Autarch of Lingane, your father and my cousin," Gillbret said. "Despite your father's cautious phraseology, Biron, it was obvious that the Autarch was the organizer of the conspiracy.

"And then," he hesitated, "there was a mission from Lingane and the Autarch himself was at its head. I—I told him of the 'rebellion world.'"

"You said a while ago you told nobody," Biron objected.

"Except the Autarch. I *had* to know the truth."

"What did he tell you?"

"Practically nothing. But, then, he had to be cautious, too. Could he trust me? I might have been working for the Tyranni. How could he know? But he didn't close the door altogether. It's our only lead."

"Is it?" Biron said. "Then we'll go to Lingane. One place, I suppose, is like another."

Mention of his father had depressed him, and, for the moment, nothing mattered much. Let it be Lingane.

LET it be Lingane! That was easy to say. But how does one go about pointing the ship at a tiny speck of light thirty-five light years away? Two hundred trillion miles.

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A two with seventeen zeroes after it. At ten thousand miles an hour, (current cruising speed of the *Remorseless*) it would take well over two million years to get there.

Biron leafed through the "Standard Galactic Ephemeris" with something like despair. Tens of thousands of stars were listed in detail, with their positions crammed into three figures. There were hundreds of pages of these figures, symbolized by the Greek letters rho, theta, and phi.

Rho was the distance from the Galactic Center in parsecs; theta, the angular separation, along the plane of the Galactic Lens from the Standard Galactic Baseline (the line, that is, which connects the Galactic Center and the sun of the planet Earth); phi, the angular separation from the Baseline in the plane perpendicular to that of the Galactic Lens, the two latter measurements being expressed in radians. Given those three figures, one could locate any star accurately in all the vast immensity of space.

THAT is, on a given date. In addition to the star's position on the day for which all the data were calculated, one had to know the star's proper motion, both speed and direction. It was a small correction, comparatively, but necessary. A million miles is virtually nothing compared with stellar distances, but a long way with a ship.

There was, of course, the question of the ship's own position. One could calculate the distance from Rhodia by the reading of the massometer, or, more correctly, the distance from Rhodia's sun, since this far out in space the sun's gravitational field drowned out that of any of its planets. The direction they were traveling along with reference to the Galactic Baseline was more difficult to determine. Biron had to locate two known stars other than Rhodia's sun. From their apparent positions and the known distance from Rhodia's sun, he could plot their actual position.

It was roughly done, but, he felt sure, accurately enough. Knowing his own position and that of Lingane's sun, it was only a matter of adjusting the controls for the proper direction and strength of the hyperatomic thrust.

Biron felt lonely and tense. *Not* frightened. He rejected the word. But tense, definitely. He was deliberately calculating the elements of the Jump for six hours later. He wanted plenty of time to check his figures. And perhaps there might be the chance for a nap. He had dragged the bedding out of the cabin and it was ready for him.

The other two were, presumably, sleeping in the cabin. He told himself that that was a good thing and that he wanted nobody around bothering him, yet when he heard the small sound of bare feet outside, he looked up with involuntary eagerness.

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"Hello," he said. "Why aren't you sleeping?"

Artemisia stood in the doorway, hesitating. She said, in a small voice, "Do you mind if I come in? Will I be bothering you?"

"It depends on what you do."

"I'll try to do the right things."

She seemed *too* humble, Biron thought suspiciously, and then the reason for it came out.

"I'm awfully frightened," she said. "Aren't you?"

He wanted to say no, not at all, but it didn't come out that way. He smiled sheepishly and said, "Sort of."

Oddly enough, that comforted her. She knelt down on the floor beside him, and looked at the thick volumes opened before him and at the sheets of calculations.

"They had all these books here?"

"You bet. They couldn't pilot a ship without them."

"And you understand all that?"

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"Not *all* that. I wish, I did. I hope I understand enough. We'll have to Jump to Lingane, you know."

"Is that hard to do?"

"No, not if you know the figures, which are all here, and have the controls which are all there, *and* if you have experience, which I haven't. For instance, it should be done in several Jumps, but I'm going to try it in one because there'll be less chance of trouble, even though it means a waste of energy."

He shouldn't tell her; there was no point in telling her; it would be cowardly to frighten her; and she'd be hard to handle if she got really frightened, panicky frightened. He kept telling himself all that and it did no good. He wanted to share it with somebody. He wanted part of it off his own mind.

He said, "There are some things I should know that I don't. Things like the mass-density between here and Lingane affect the course of the Jump, because that mass density is what controls the curvature of this part of the universe. The 'Ephemeris'—that's this big book here—mentions the curvature corrections that must be made in certain standard Jumps and from that you're supposed to be able to calculate out your own particular corrections. But then if you happen to have a super-giant star within ten light years, all bets are off. I'm not even sure if I used the computer correctly."

"But what would happen if you were wrong?"

"We *could* re-enter space too close to Lingane's sun."

She considered that, then said, "You have no idea how much better I feel."

"After what I've just said?"

"Of course. In my bunk, I simply felt helpless and lost, with so much emptiness in all directions. Now I know that we're going somewhere and that the emptiness is under our control."

"I don't know about its being under our control," Biron said doubtfully.

She stopped him. "It is. I *know* you can handle the ship."

And Biron decided that maybe he might at that.

ARTEMISIA had tucked her legs under her and sat facing him. She said, "You know, I had an awfully queer sensation in the bunk, almost as if I were floating. That was one of the things that frightened me. Every time I'd turn, I'd give a queer little jump into the air and then flop back slowly as if there were springs in the air holding me back."

"You were sleeping in a top bunk?"

"Yes. The bottom ones give me claustrophobia, with another mattress only six inches over my head."

Biron laughed. "Then that explains it. The ship's gravitational

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force is directed toward its base, and falls off as you move away from it. In the top bunk, you were probably twenty or thirty pounds lighter than on the floor. Were you ever on a passenger liner? A really big one?"

"Once. When father and I visited Tyrann last year."

"Well, on the liners they have the gravitation in all parts of the ship directed toward the outer hull, so that the long axis of the ship is always 'up,' no matter where you are. That's why the motors of one of those big ships are always lined up in a cylinder running right along the long axis. No gravity there."

"It must take an awful lot of power to keep an artificial gravity going."

"Enough to power a small town."

"There isn't any danger of our running short of fuel, is there?"

"Don't worry about that. Ships are fueled by the total conversion of mass to energy. Fuel is the last thing we'll run out of. The outer hull will wear away first."

She was facing him. He noted that her face had been cleaned of its makeup and wondered how that had been done; probably with a handkerchief and as little of the drinking water as she could manage. She didn't suffer as a result, for her clear white skin was the more startlingly perfect against the black of her hair and eyes. Her eyes were very warm, thought Biron.

The silence had lasted a little too long. He said, hurriedly, "You don't travel very much, do you? I mean, you were on a liner only once?"

SHE nodded. "Once too often. If we hadn't gone to Tyrann, that filthy chamberlain wouldn't have seen me and—I don't want to talk about that."

Biron let it go. He said, "Is that usual? I mean, not traveling?"

"I'm afraid so. Father is always hopping around on state visits, opening agricultural expositions, dedicating buildings. He usually just makes some speech that Aratap writes for him. As for the rest of us, however, the more we stay in the palace, the better the Tyranni like it. Poor Gillbret! The one and only time he left Rhodia was to attend the Khan's coronation as father's representative. They've never let him get into a ship again."

Her eyes were downcast and, absently, she pleated the material of Biron's sleeve where it ended at the wrist. She said, "Biron."

"Yes—Arta?" He stumbled a bit, but it came out.

"Do you think Uncle Gil's story can be true?"

"I don't know."

"Do you suppose it could be his imagination? He's been brooding about the Tyranni for years, and he's never been able to do anything, of course, except to rig up spy beams, which is only childish,

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and he knows it. He may have built himself a daydream and, over the years, gradually come to believe in it. I *know* him, you see."

"It's possible, but let's follow it up a little. We can travel to Lingane, anyway."

They were closer to one another. He could have reached out and touched her, held her in his arms, kissed her.

And he did so.

It was a complete *non sequitur.* Nothing, it seemed to Biron, had led to it. One moment they were discussing Jumps and gravity and Gillbret, and the next she was soft and silky in his arms and soft and silky on his lips.

His first impulse was to say he was sorry, to go through all the silly motions of apology, but when he drew away, and would have spoken, she still made no attempt at escape but rested her head in the crook of his left arm. Her eyes remained closed.

So he said nothing at all and kissed her again, slowly and thoroughly.

It was the best thing he could have done, and at the time he knew it.

Finally, she said, a bit dreamily, "Aren't you hungry? I'll bring you some of the concentrate and warm it for you. Then, if you want to sleep, I can keep an eye on things for you. And—and I'd better put on more of my clothes."

She turned as she was about to pass out the door. "The food concentrate tastes very nice after you get used to it. Thank you for getting it."

Somehow *that,* rather than the kisses, was the treaty of peace between them.

WHEN Gillbret entered the control room, hours later, he showed no surprise at finding Biron and Artemisia lost in a foolish kind of conversation. He made no remarks about the fact that Biron's arm was about his niece's waist.

He asked, "When are we Jumping, Biron?"

"In half an hour," said Biron.

The half-hour passed; the controls were set; conversation languished and died.

At zero time, Biron drew a deep breath and yanked a lever the full length of its arc, from left to right.

It was not as it had been aboard the liner. The *Remorseless* was smaller and the Jump was consequently less smooth. Biron staggered and for a split-second things wavered.

And then they were smooth and solid again.

The stars in the visiplate had changed. Biron rotated the ship so that the star-field lifted, each star moving in a stately arc. One star appeared finally, brilliantly white and more than a point. It was a tiny sphere, a burning speck of sand. Biron caught it, steadied the ship before it was lost again, and

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turned the telescope upon it, throwing in the spectroscopic attachment.

He turned again to the "Ephemeris," and checked under the column headed "Spectral Characteristics." Then he got out of the pilot's chair and said, "It's still too far. I'll have to nudge up to it. But anyway, that's Lingane right ahead."

It was the first Jump he had ever made, and it was successful.

CHAPTER XII

The Autarch Comes

THE Autarch of Lingane pondered the matter, but his cool, well-trained features scarcely creased under the strain of thought.

"And you waited forty-eight hours to tell me," he accused.

Rizzett said boldly, "There was no reason to tell you earlier. If we bombarded you with all matters, life would be a burden to you. We tell you now, because we still make nothing of it. It is queer, and in our position, we can afford nothing queer."

"Repeat this business. Let me hear it again."

The Autarch threw a leg upon the flaring window-sill and looked outward thoughtfully. The window itself represented perhaps the greatest single oddity of Linganian architecture. It was moderate in size and set at the end of a five-foot recess that narrowed gently toward it. It was extremely clear, immensely thick and precisely curved, not so much a window as a lens, funneling the light inward from all directions, so that, looking outward, one eyed a miniature panorama.

When the position of the sun made the lenslike windows a focus for impossible heat and light, they were blanked out automatically, rather than opened; rendered opaque by a shift in the polarization characteristics of the glass.

And certainly the theory that a planet's architecture is the reflection of a planet's place in the Galaxy would seem to be borne out by Lingane and its windows.

Like the windows, Lingane was small, yet commanded a panoramic view. It was a "planet-state" in a Galaxy, which, at the time, had passed beyond that stage of economic and political development. Where most political units were conglomerations of stellar systems, Lingane remained what it had been for centuries; a single inhabited world. This did not prevent it from being wealthy. In fact, it was almost inconceivable that Lingane could be anything else.

It is difficult to tell in advance when a world is so located that many Jump-routes may use it as a pivotal intermediate point; or even *must* use it in the interests of optimal economy. A great deal depends on the pattern of development of that region of space. There

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is the question of the distribution of the naturally habitable planets; the order in which they are colonized and developed; the types of economy they possess.

Lingane discovered its own values early, which was the great turning-point of its history. Next to the actual possession of a strategic position, the capacity to appreciate and exploit that position is most important. Lingane had proceeded to occupy small planetoids with neither resources nor capacity for supporting an independent population, choosing them only because they would help maintain Lingane's trade monopoly. They built servicing stations on those rocks. All that ships could need, from hyperatomic replacements to new book-reels, could be found there. The stations grew to huge trading posts. From all the Nebular Kingdoms, fur, minerals, grain, beef, timber poured in; from the Inner Kingdoms, machinery, appliances, medicinals, finished products of all sorts.

So that, like its windows, Lingane's minuteness looked out on all the Galaxy. It was a planet alone; but it did well.

THE Autarch said turning from the window, "Start with the mail ship, Rizzett. Where did they meet this cruiser in the first place?"

"Less than one hundred thousand miles off Lingane. The exact coordinates don't matter. They've been watched ever since. The point is that even then, the Tyranni cruiser was in an orbit about the planet."

"As though it had no intention of landing, but rather was waiting for something."

"Yes."

"No way of telling how long they'd been waiting?"

"Impossible, I'm afraid. They were sighted by no one else. We checked thoroughly."

"Very well," said the Autarch. "We'll abandon that for the moment. They stopped the mail ship; which is, of course, interference with the mails and a violation of our Articles of Association with Tyrann."

"I doubt that they were Tyranni. Their unsure actions are more those of outlaws; of prisoners in flight."

"You mean the men on the Tyranni cruiser? It may be what they want us to believe, of course. At any rate, their only overt action was to ask that a message be delivered directly to me."

"Directly to the Autarch."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"They at no time entered the mail ship?"

"All communication was by visiplate. The mail capsule was shot across two miles of empty space and caught by ship's net."

"Was it vision communication or sound only?"

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"Full vision. That's the point. The speaker was described by several as being a young man of 'aristocratic bearing,' whatever that means."

THE Autarch's fist clenched slowly. "And no photo-impression was taken of the face? That was a mistake."

"Unfortunately there was no reason for the mail captain to have anticipated the importance of doing so. If any importance exists. Does all this mean anything to you, sir?"

The Autarch did not answer the question. "And this is the message?"

"Exactly. A tremendous message of one word that we were supposed to bring directly to you; a thing we did not do, of course. It might have been a fission capsule, for instance. Men have been killed that way before."

"Yes, and Autarchs too," said the Autarch. "Just the word 'Gillbret.' One word, 'Gillbret.' "

The Autarch maintained his indifferent calm, but a lack of certainty was gathering and he did not like to experience a lack of certainty. He liked nothing which made him aware of limitations. An Autarch should have no limitations, and on Lingane he had none that natural law did not impose.

Under the Autarchy, Lingane increased its wealth and strength. Even the Tyranni, attacking thirty years earlier at the height of their power, had been fought to a standstill. They had not been defeated, but they had been stopped. The shock, even of that, had been permanent. Not a planet had been conquered by the Tyranni since the year they had attacked Lingane.

Other planets of the Nebular Kingdoms were outright vassals of the Tyranni. Lingane, however, was an Associated State, theoretically the equal "Ally" of Tyrann, with its rights guarded by the Articles of Association.

The Autarch was not fooled by the situation. The chauvinistic of the planet might allow themselves the luxury of considering themselves free, but the Autarch knew that the Tyranni danger had been held at arm's-length this past generation. Only that far. No farther.

And now it might be moving in quickly for the final, long-delayed bear hug. Certainly, he had given it the opportunity it was waiting for. The organization he had built up, ineffectual though it was, was sufficient grounds for punitive action of any type the Tyranni might care to undertake. Legally, Lingane would be in the wrong.

Was the cruiser the first reaching out for the final bear hug?

The Autarch said, "Has a guard been placed on that ship?"

"I said they were watched. Two of our—" he smiled one-sidedly—"*freighters* keep in massometer range."

"What do you make of it?"

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"I don't know. The only Gillbret I know whose name by itself would *mean anything* is Gillbret oth Hinriad of Rhodia. Have you had dealings with him?"

The Autarch said, "I saw him on my last visit to Rhodia."

"You told him nothing, of course."

"Of course."

Rizzett's eyes narrowed. "I thought there might have been a certain lack of caution on your part; that the Tyranni had been the recipients of an equal lack of caution on the part of this Gillbret—the Hinriads are notable weaklings these days—and that this now was a device to trap you into final self-betrayal."

"I doubt it. It comes at a queer time, this business. I have been away from Lingane for a year or more. I arrived last week and I shall leave in a matter of days again. A message such as this reaches me just when I am in a position to be reached."

"You don't think it is a coincidence?"

"I don't believe in coincidence. And there is one way in which all this would not be coincidence. I will therefore visit that ship. Alone."

"Impossible, sir." Rizzett was startled. He had a small, uneven scar just above his right temple and it showed suddenly red.

"You forbid me?" asked the Autarch, drily.

And he was the Autarch, after all. Rizzett's face fell and he said, "As you please, sir."

ABOARD the *Remorseless*, the wait was proving increasingly unpleasant. For two days, they hadn't budged from their orbit. Gillbret watched the controls with relentless concentration. His voice had an edge to it.

"Wouldn't you say they were moving?"

Biron looked up briefly. He was shaving, and handling the Tyranni erosive-spray with finicky care.

"No," he said, "they're not moving. Why should they? They're watching us, and they'll keep on watching us."

He concentrated upon the difficult area of the upper lip, frowning impatiently as he felt the slightly sour taste of the spray upon his tongue. A Tyrannian could handle the spray with a grace that was almost poetic. It was undoubtedly the quickest and closest non-permanent shaving method in existence, in the hands of an expert. In essence, it was an extremely fine air-blown abrasive that scoured off the hairs without harming the skin. Certainly the skin felt nothing more than the gentle pressure of what might have been an air-stream.

Biron was surveying his face in the mirror, wondering how he would look in sideburns down to the angle of the jaw, when Artemisia said from the doorway, "I

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thought you were going to sleep."

"I did," he said. "Then I woke up."

He looked at her and smiled.

She patted his cheek, then stroked it gently with her fingers, "It's smooth. You look about eighteen."

He carried her hand to his lips. "Don't let that fool you."

SHE said, "They're still watching?"

"Still watching. Isn't it annoying? These damned dull interludes that give you time to sit and worry."

"I don't find this interlude at all dull."

"You're talking about other aspects of it now, Arta."

She said, "Why don't we cross them up and land on Lingane?"

"We've thought of it. I don't think we're ready for that kind of risk. We can afford to wait till the water-supply gets a bit lower."

Gillbret said loudly, "I tell you they *are* moving."

Biron crossed over to the control panel and considered the massometer readings.

He looked at Gillbret and said, "You may be right."

He pecked away at the calculator for a moment or two and stared at its dials.

"No, the two ships haven't moved relative to us, Gillbret. What's changed the massometer is that a third ship has joined them. As near as I can tell, it's 5,000 miles off, about 46 degrees rho and 192 degrees from the ship-planet line, if I've got the clockwise and counterclockwise conventions straight. If I haven't, the figures are, respectively, 314 and 168 degrees."

He paused to take another reading. "I think they're approaching. It's a small ship. Do you think you can get in touch with them, Gillbret?"

"I can try."

"All right. No vision. Let's leave it at sound, till we get some notion of what's coming."

It was amazing to watch Gillbret at the controls of the etheric radio. He was obviously the possessor of a native talent. Contacting an isolated point in space with a tight radio-beam remains, after all, a task in which the ship's control panel information can participate only slightly. He had a notion of the distance of the ship which might be off by a hundred miles plus-or-minus. He had two angles, either or both of which might easily be wrong by five or six degrees in any direction.

This left a volume of about ten million cubic miles within which the ship might be. The rest was left to the human operator, and a radio beam which was a probing finger not half a mile in cross-section at the widest point of its receivable range. It was said that a skilled operator could tell by the

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feel of the controls how closely the beam missed the target. Scientifically, that theory is nonsense, of course, but it often seemed that no other explanation was possible.

In less than ten minutes, the activity gauge of the radio was jumping and the *Remorseless* was both sending and receiving.

In another ten minutes, Biron could lean back and say, "They're going to send a man aboard."

"Ought we to let them?" asked Artemisia.

"Why not? One man? We're armed."

"But if we let their ship get too close?"

"We're a Tyrannian cruiser, Arta. We've got three to five times their power, even if they are the best warship Lingane had. They're not allowed too much by their precious Articles of Association, and we've got five high-caliber blasters."

Artemisia said, "Do you know how to use the Tyranni blasters? I didn't know you did."

Biron hated to turn the admiration off, but he said, "Unfortunately, I don't. At least, not yet. But then the Linganian ship won't know that, you see."

HALF an hour later, the visiplate showed a visible ship. It was a stubby little craft, fitted with two sets of four fins as though it were frequently called upon to double for stratospheric flight.

At its first appearance in the telescope, Gillbret had shouted in delight, "That's the Autarch's yacht," and his face wrinkled into a grin. "It's his private yacht, I'm sure of it. I told you that the bare mention of my name was the surest way to get his attention."

There was the period of deceleration and adjustment of velocity on the part of the Linganian ship, until it hung motionless in the plate.

A thin voice came from the receiver: "Ready for boarding?"

"Ready!" said Biron. "One person only."

"One person," came the response.

It was like a snake uncoiling, the metal-mesh rope looping outward from the Linganian ship, shooting at them harpoon-fashion. Its thickness expanded in the visiplate and the magnetized cylinder that ended it approached and grew in size. As it grew closer, it edged toward rim of the cone of vision, then veered off completely.

The sound of its contact was hollow and reverberant. The magnetized weight was anchored, and the line was a spider-thread that did not sag in a normal weighted curve but retained whatever kinks and loops it had possessed at the moment of contact. These moved slowly forward as units under the influence of inertia.

Easily and carefully, the Linganian ship edged away and the line straightened. It hung there then, taut and fine, thinning into space

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until it was an almost invisible thing, glittering with incredible daintiness in the light of Lingane's sun.

Biron threw in the telescopic attachment, which bloated the ship monstrously in the field of vision, so that one could see the origin of the half-mile length of connecting line, and the little figure that was beginning to swing hand over hand along it.

It was not the usual form of boarding. Ordinarily, two ships would maneuver to near-contact, so that extensible airlocks could meet and merge under intense magnetic fields. A tunnel through space would thus connect the ships and a man could travel from one to the other with no further protection than he needed to wear aboard ship. Naturally, this form of boarding required mutual trust.

By space-line, one was dependent upon his spacesuit. The approaching Linganian was bloated in his; a fat thing of air-extended metal mesh, the joints of which required no small muscular effort to work. Even at the distance at which he was, Biron could see his arms flex with a snap as the joint gave and came to rest in a new groove.

And the mutual velocities of the two ships had to be carefully adjusted. An inadvertent acceleration on the part of either would tear the line loose and send the traveler tumbling through space under the easy grip of the faraway sun and of the initial impulse of the snapping line—with nothing, neither friction nor obstruction, to stop him this side of eternity.

The approaching Linganian moved on confidently and quickly. When he came closer it was easy to see that it was not a simple hand over hand procedure. Each time the forward hand flexed, pulling him on, he would let go and float onward some dozen feet before his other hand reached forward for a new hold.

It was a brachiation through space. The spaceman was a gleaming metal gibbon.

ARTEMISIA asked, "What if he misses?"

"He looks too expert to do that," said Biron, "but if he does, he'd still shine in the sun. We'd pick him up again."

The Linganian was close now. He had passed out of the field of the visiplate. In another five seconds, there was the clatter of gauntleted feet on the ship's hull.

Biron yanked the lever that lit the signals which outlined the ship's airlock. A moment later, in answer to an imperative series of raps, the outer door was opened. There was a thump just beyond a blank section of the pilot room's wall. The outer door closed; the section of wall slid away; and a man stepped through.

His suit frosted over instantly, blanking the thick glass of his hel-

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met and turning him into a mound of white. The air grew cold. Biron elevated the heaters and the renewing gush that entered was warm and dry. For a moment, the frost on the suit held its own, then began to thin and dissolve into a dew.

The Linganian's blunt metal fingers were fumbling at the clasps of the helmet as though he were impatient with his snowy blindness. It lifted off as a unit, the thick, soft insulation inside rumpling his hair as it passed.

Gillbret exclaimed, "Your Excellency!" In glad triumph, he said, "Biron, it is the Autarch himself."

But Biron, in a voice that struggled vainly against stupefaction, could only gasp, "Jonti!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Autarch Remains

THE Autarch gently toed the suit to one side and appropriated the larger of the padded chairs.

He said, "I haven't had that sort of exercise in quite a while. But they say it never leaves you once you've learned, and, apparently, it hasn't in my case. Hello, Farrill. My lord Gillbret, good day. And this, if I remember, is the Director's daughter, the lady Artemisia."

He placed a long cigaret carefully between his lips and brought it to life with a single intake of breath. The scented tobacco filled the air with its pleasant odor. "I did not expect to see you quite so soon, Farrill," he said.

"Or at all, perhaps?" asked Biron, acidly.

"One never knows," agreed the Autarch. "Of course, with a message that read only 'Gillbret;' with the knowledge that Gillbret could not pilot a spaceship; with the further knowledge that I had myself sent a young man to Rhodia who *could* pilot a spaceship and who was quite capable of stealing a Tyrannian cruiser in his desperation to escape; and with the final knowledge that one of the men on the cruiser was reported to be young and of aristocratic bearing; the conclusion was obvious. I am not surprised to see you."

"I think you are," said Biron. "I think you're as surprised as hell to see me. As an assassin, you should be. Do you think I am worse at deduction than you are?"

"I think very highly of you."

The Autarch was completely unperturbed, and Biron felt awkward and stupid in his resentment. He turned furiously to the others. "This man is Sander Jonti; the Sander Jonti I've told you of. He may be the Autarch of Lingane besides, or fifty Autarchs. It makes no difference. To me he is Sander Jonti."

Artemisia said, "*He* is the man who—"

Gillbret put a thin and shaking hand to his brow. "Control yourself, Biron. Are you mad?"

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"This *is* the man! I am *not* mad!" shouted Biron. He checked himself with an effort. "All right. There's no point yelling, I suppose. Get off my ship, Jonti. That's said quietly enough. Get off my ship."

"My dear Farrill, for what reason?"

Gillbret made incoherent sounds in his throat, but Biron pushed him aside roughly and faced the seated Autarch. "You made one mistake, Jonti. Just one. You couldn't tell in advance that when I got out of my dormitory room back on Earth, I would leave my wristwatch inside. You see, my wristwatch strap happened to be a radiation indicator."

The Autarch blew a smoke ring and smiled pleasantly.

Biron said, "And that strap never turned blue, Jonti. There was no radiation bomb in my room that night. There was only a deliberately planted dud! If you deny it, you are a liar, Jonti, or Autarch, or whatever you call yourself.

"What is more, *you* planted that dud. *You* knocked me out with Hypnite and arranged the rest of that night's comedy. It makes quite obvious sense, you know. If I had been left to myself, I would have slept through the night, and would never have known that anything was out of the way. So who rang me on the visiphone until he was sure I had awakened—awakened, that is, to discover the bomb, which had been deliberately placed near a radiation counter so that I could not miss it? Who blasted my door in so that I might leave the room before I found out that the bomb was only a dud after all? You must have enjoyed yourself that night, Jonti."

Biron waited for effect, but the Autarch merely nodded in polite interest. Biron felt the fury mount. It was like punching pillows, whipping water, kicking air.

HE SAID harshly, "My father was to be executed. I would have learned of it soon enough. I would have gone to Nephelos, or not gone. I would have followed my own good sense in the matter, confronted the Tyranni openly or not as I decided. I would have known my chances. I would have been prepared for eventualities.

"But you wanted me to go to Rhodia; to see Hinrik. But, ordinarily, you couldn't expect me to do what *you* wanted. I wasn't likely to go to *you* for advice. Unless, that is, you could stage an appropriate situation. You did!

"I thought I was being bombed and I could think of no reason. You could. You seemed to have saved my life. You seemed to know everything; what I ought to do next, for instance. I was off-balance, confused. I followed your advice."

Biron ran out of breath and waited for an answer. There was none. He shouted, "You didn't explain that the ship on which I left

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Earth was a Rhodian ship and that you had seen to it that the captain had been informed of my true identity. You didn't explain that you intended me to be in the hands of the Tyranni the instant I landed on Rhodia. Do you deny that?"

There was a long pause. Jonti stubbed out his cigaret.

Gillbret chafed one hand in the other. "Biron, you are being ridiculous. The Autarch wouldn't—"

Then Jonti looked up and said quietly, "But the Autarch would. I admit it all. You are quite right, Biron, and I congratulate you on your penetration. The bomb *was* a dud planted by myself and I sent you to Rhodia with the intention of having you arrested by the Tyranni."

Biron's face cleared. Some of the futility of anger vanished. He said, "Some day, Jonti, I will settle that matter. At the moment, it seems you are Autarch of Lingane with three ships waiting for you out there. That hampers me a bit more than I would like. However, the *Remorseless* is my ship. I am its pilot. Put on your suit and get out. The spaceline is still in place."

"It is not your ship. You are a pirate, not a pilot."

"Possession is all the law here. You have five minutes to get into your suit."

"Let's avoid dramatics. We need one another and I have no intention of leaving."

"I don't need *you*. I wouldn't need you if the Tyranni home fleet were closing in right now and you could blast them out of space for me."

"Farrill," said Jonti, "you are talking and acting like an adolescent. I've let you have your say. May I have *mine*?"

"No. I see no reason to listen."

"Do you see one now?"

Artemisia screamed. Biron made one movement, then stopped. Red with frustration, he remained poised and helpless.

Jonti said, "I do take certain precautions. I am sorry to be so crude as to use a weapon as a threat. But I imagine it will help me force you to hear me."

The weapon he held was a pocket-blaster. It was not designed to pain or stun. It was the lethal model.

JONTI said, "For years, I have been organizing Lingane against the Tyranni. Do you know what that means? It has not been easy. It has been almost impossible. The Inner Kingdoms will offer no help; we've known that from long experience. There is no salvation for the Nebular Kingdoms, except from themselves. But to convince our native leaders of this is no friendly game. Your father was active in the matter and was killed. Not a friendly game at all. Remember that.

"And your father's capture was a crisis to us. It was life and horrible

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death to us. He was in our inner circles and the Tyranni were obviously not far behind us. They had to be thrown off-stride. To do so, I could scarcely temper my dealings with honor and integrity. They fry no eggs.

"I couldn't come to you and say, 'Farrill, we've got to put the Tyranni on a false scent. You're the son of the Rancher and therefore suspicious. Get out there and be friendly with Hinrik of Rhodia so that the Tyranni may look in the wrong direction. Lead them away from Lingane. It may be dangerous; you may lose your life, but the ideals for which your father died come first.'

"Maybe you would have done it, but I couldn't afford to experiment. I maneuvered you into doing it without your knowledge. It was hard; I'll grant you. Still, I had no choice. I thought you might not survive; I tell you that frankly. But you were expendable; and I tell you *that* frankly. As it turned out, you did survive, and I am pleased with that.

"And there was one more thing, a matter of a document—"

Biron said, "What document?"

"You jump quickly. I said your father was working for me, so I know what he knew. You were to obtain that document and you were a good choice, at first. You were on Earth legitimately. You were young and not likely to be suspected. I say, *at first!*

"But then, with your father arrested, you became dangerous. You would be an object of prime suspicion to the Tyranni; and we could not allow the document to fall into your possession, since it would then almost inevitably fall into theirs. We had to get you off Earth before you could complete your mission. You see, it all hangs together."

"Then *you* have it now?" asked Biron.

The Autarch said, "No, I have

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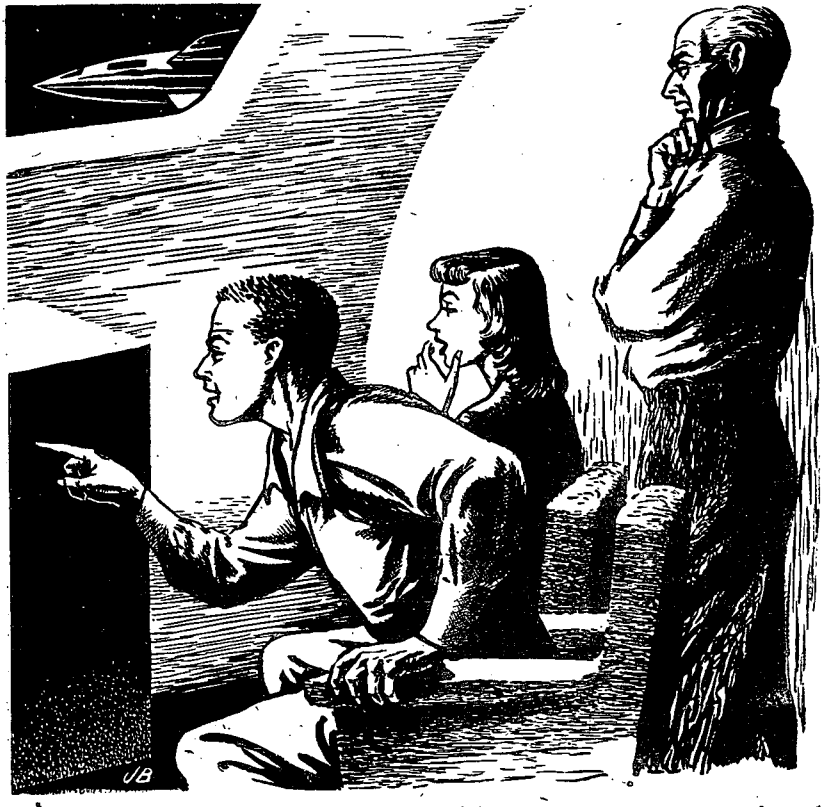

not. A document which might have been the right one has been missing from Earth for years. If it *is* the right one, I don't know who has it. May I put away the blaster now? It grows heavy."

BIRON said, "Put it away."

The Autarch did so. He said, "What has your father told you about the document?"

"Nothing that you don't know, since he worked for you."

The Autarch smiled. "Quite so!" But the smile had little of real amusement in it.

"Are you through with your explanation now?"

"Quite through."

"Then," said Biron, "get off the ship."

Gillbret said, "Now wait, Biron. There's more than private anger to be considered here. There's Artemisia and myself, too, you know. We have *something* to say. As far as I'm concerned, what the Autarch says makes sense. I'll remind you

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that on Rhodia I saved your life, so I think my views are to be considered."

"All right. You saved my life," shouted Biron. He pointed a finger towards the airlock. "Go with him, then. Go on. You get out of here, too. You wanted to find the Autarch. There he is! I agreed to pilot you to him and my responsibility is over. Don't try to tell *me* what to do."

He turned to Artemisia, some of his anger still brimming over. "And what about you? You saved my life, too. Everyone went around saving my life. Do you want to go with him, too?"

She said, quietly, "Don't put words into my mouth, Biron. If I wanted to go with him, I'd certainly say so."

"Don't feel any obligations. You can leave any time."

She looked hurt and he turned away. As usual, some cooler part of himself knew that he was acting childishly. He had been made to look foolish by Jonti and he was helpless in the face of the resentment he felt. And besides, why should they all take so calmly the thesis that it was perfectly right to have Biron Farrill thrown to the Tyranni, like a bone to the dogs, in order to keep them off Jonti's neck? Damn it, what did they think he was?

He thought of the dud bomb, the Rhodian liner, the Tyranni, the wild night on Rhodia, and he could feel the stinging of self-pity inside himself.

The Autarch said, "Well, Farrill?"

And Gillbret said, "Well, Biron?"

Biron turned to Artemisia. "What do *you* think?"

ARTEMISIA said, calmly, "I think he has three ships out there, and is Autarch of Lingane, besides. I don't think you really have a choice."

The Autarch looked at her, and he nodded his admiration. "You are an intelligent girl, my Lady. It is good that such a mind should be in such a pleasant exterior." For a measurable moment, his eyes lingered.

Biron said, "What's the deal?"

"Lend me the use of your names and your abilities, and I will take you to what my lord Gillbret called the 'Rebellion World.'"

Biron said, sourly, "You think there *is* one?"

And Gillbret said, simultaneously, "Then it *is* yours."

The Autarch smiled. "I think there is a world such as my lord described, but it is not mine."

"It's *not* yours?" exclaimed Gillbret, stunned.

"Does that matter, if I can find it?"

"How?" demanded Biron.

The Autarch said, "It is not as difficult as you might think. If we accept the story as it has been told

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us, we must believe that there exists a world in rebellion against the Tyranni. We must believe that it is located somewhere in the Nebular Sector and that, in twenty years, it has remained undiscovered by the Tyranni. If such a situation is to remain possible, there is only one place in the Sector where such a planet can exist."

"And where is that?"

"You do not find the solution obvious? Doesn't it seem inevitable that the world could exist only within the Nebula itself?"

"*Inside* the Nebula!"

Gillbret said, "Great Galaxy, of *course!*"

And at the moment, the solution did indeed seem obvious and inescapable.

Artemisia asked, timidly, "Can people live on worlds inside the Nebula?"

"Why not?" said the Autarch. "Don't mistake the Nebula. It is a dark mist in space, but it is not a poison gas. It is an incredibly attenuated mass of sodium, potassium, and calcium atoms that absorb and obscure the light of the stars within it, and, of course, those on the side directly opposite the observer. Otherwise, it is harmless, and, in the direct neighborhood of a star, virtually undetectable.

"I apologize if I seem pedantic, but I have spent the last several months at the University of Earth collecting astronomical data on the Nebula."

"Why there?" said Biron. "It is a matter of little importance, but I met you there and I am curious."

"There's no mystery to it. I left Lingane originally on my own business. The exact nature is of no importance. About six months ago, I visited Rhodia. My agent, Widemos—your father, Biron—had been unsuccessful in his negotiations with the Director, whom we had hoped to swing to our side. I tried to improve matters and failed, since Hinrik, with apologies to the lady, is not the type of material for our sort of work."

"HEAR, hear," said Biron.

The Autarch continued, "But I did meet Gillbret, as he may have told you. So I went to Earth, because Earth is the original home of humanity. It was from Earth that most of the original explorations of the Galaxy set out. It is upon Earth that most of the records exist. The Horsehead Nebula was explored quite thoroughly; at least, it was passed through a number of times. It was never settled, since the difficulties of traveling through a volume of space where stellar observations could not be made were too great. The explorations themselves, however, were all I needed.

"Now listen carefully. The Tyranni ship upon which my lord Gillbret was marooned was struck by a meteor after its first jump. Assuming that the trip from Tyrann to Rhodia was along the usual trade

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route (and there is no reason to suppose anything else) the point in space at which the ship left its route is established. It would scarcely have traveled more than half a million miles in ordinary space between the first two Jumps. We can consider such a length as a point in space.

"It is possible to make another assumption. In damaging the control panels, it was quite possible that the meteor might have altered the direction of the Jumps, since that would require only an interference with the motion of the ship's gyroscope. This would be difficult, but not impossible. To change the *power* of the hyperatomic thrusts, however, would require complete smashing of the engines, which, of course, were not touched by the meteor.

"With unchanged power of thrust, the length of the four remaining Jumps would not be changed, nor, for that matter, would their relative directions. It would be analogous to having a long, crooked wire bent at a single point in an unknown direction through an unknown angle. The final position of the ship would lie somewhere on the surface of an imaginary sphere, the center of which would be that point in space where the meteor struck, and the radius of which would be the vector sum of the remaining Jumps.

"I plotted such a sphere, and that surface intersects a thick extension of the Horsehead Nebula. Some six thousand square degrees of the sphere's surface, one-fourth of the total surface, lie in the Nebula. It remains, therefore, only to find a star lying within the Nebula and within one million miles or so of the imaginary surface we are discussing. You will remember that when Gillbret's ship came to rest, it was within reach of a star.

"Now how many stars within the Nebula do you suppose we can find that close to the sphere's surface? Remember there are one hundred billion radiating stars in the Galaxy."

BIRON found himself absorbed in the matter against his will. "Hundreds, I suppose."

"Five!" replied the Autarch. "Just five. Don't be fooled by the one hundred billion figure. The galaxy is about seven trillion cubic light years in volume, so that there are seventy cubic light years per star on the average. It is a pity that I do not know which of those five have habitable planets; we might reduce the number of possibles to one. Unfortunately, the early explorers had no time for detailed observations. They plotted the positions of the stars, the proper motions, and the spectral types."

"So that on one of those five stellar systems," said Biron, "is located the 'rebellion world?' "

"Only that conclusion would fit the facts we know."

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"Assuming Gil's story can be accepted."

"I make that assumption."

"My story is true," interrupted Gillbret intensely. "I swear it."

"I am about to leave," said the Autarch, "to investigate each of the five worlds. My motives in doing so are obvious. As Autarch of Lingane I can take an equal part in their efforts."

"And with two Hinriads and a Widemos on your side, your bid for an equal part, and, presumably, a strong and secure position in the new, free worlds to come, would be so much the better," said Biron.

"Your cynicism doesn't disturb me, Farrill. The answer is obviously yes. If there is to be a successful rebellion, it would, again obviously, be desirable to have your fist on the winning side."

"Otherwise, some successful privateer or rebel captain might be rewarded with the Autarchy of Lingane."

"Or the Ranchy of Widemos."

"And if the rebellion is not successful?"

"There will be time to judge when we find what we look for."

BIRON said slowly, "I'll go with you."

"Good! Then suppose we make arrangements for your transfer from this ship."

"Why that?"

"It would be better for you. This ship is a toy."

"It is a Tyrannian warship. We would be wrong in abandoning it."

"As a Tyrannian warship, it would be dangerously conspicuous."

"Not in the Nebula. I'm sorry, Jonti. I'm joining you out of expediency. I can be frank, too. I want to find the 'rebellion world.' But there's no friendship between us. I stay at my own controls."

"Biron," said Artemisia, gently, "the ship *is* too small for three."

"As it stands, yes, Arta. But it can be fitted with a trailer. Jonti knows that as well as I do. We'd have all the space we needed, then, and still be masters at our own controls. And it would effectively disguise the nature of the ship."

The Autarch considered. "If there is to be neither friendship nor trust, Farrill, I must protect myself. You may have your own ship and a trailer to boot, outfitted as you may wish. But I must have some guarantee for your proper behavior. The lady Artemisia, at least, must come with me."

"No!" said Biron.

The Autarch lifted his eyebrows. "No? Let the lady speak." He turned toward Artemisia, and his nostrils flared slightly. "I dare say you would find the situation very comfortable, my Lady."

"You, at least, would *not* find it comfortable, my Lord. Be assured of that," she retorted. "I shall remain here."

"I think you might reconsider if—"

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"I think not," interrupted Biron. "The lady Artemisia has made her choice."

"And you back her choice?"

"Entirely. All three of us will remain on the *Remorseless*. There will be no compromise on that."

"You choose your company oddly."

"Do I?"

"I think so." The Autarch seemed idly absorbed in his fingernails. "You seem so annoyed with me because I deceived you and placed your life in danger. It is strange then, is it not, that you should seem on such friendly terms with the daughter of a man such as Hinrik, who in deception is certainly my master."

"I know Hinrik. Your opinions of him change nothing."

"You know everything about Hinrik?"

"I know enough."

"Do you know that he killed your father?" The Autarch's finger stabbed toward Artemisia. "Do you know that the girl you are so deeply concerned to keep under your protection is the daughter of your father's murderer?"

CHAPTER XIV

The Autarch Leaves

THE tableau remained unbroken for a moment. The Autarch lit another cigaret. He was quite relaxed, his face untroubled. Gillbret had folded into the pilot's seat, his face screwed up as though he were going to burst into tears. The limp straps of the pilot's stress-absorbing outfit dangled about him and increased the lugubrious effect.

Biron, paper-white, fists clenched, faced the Autarch. Artemisia, her thin nostrils flaring, kept her eyes not on the Autarch, but on Biron.

The radio signaled, the soft clickings crashing with the effect of cymbals in the small pilot room.

Gillbret jerked upright, then whirled on the seat.

The Autarch said lazily, "I'm afraid we've been more talkative than I'd anticipated. I told Rizzett to come get me if I had not returned in an hour."

The visual screen was alive now with Rizzett's grizzled head.

Gillbret said to the Autarch, "He would like to speak to you." He made room.

The Autarch rose from his chair and advanced so that his own head was within the zone of visual transmission.

He said, "I am perfectly safe, Rizzett."

The other's question was heard clearly. "Who are the crew members on the cruiser, sir?"

And Biron stood next to the Autarch, suddenly. "I am Rancher of Widemos," he said, proudly.

Rizzett smiled gladly and broadly. A hand appeared on the screen in sharp salute. "Greetings, sir."

The Autarch interrupted, "I will

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be returning soon with a young lady. Prepare to maneuver for contact airlocks." He broke the visual connection between the two ships.

He turned to Biron. "I assured them it was you on board ship. There was some objection to my coming here alone otherwise. Your father was extremely popular with my men."

"Which is why you can use my name."

The Autarch shrugged.

BIRON said, "It is all you can use. Your last statement to your officer was inaccurate."

"In what way?"

"Artemisia oth Hinriad stays with me."

"After what I have told you?"

Biron said sharply, "You have told me nothing. You have made a bare statement, but I am not likely to take your unsupported word for anything. I tell you this without any attempt at tact. I hope you understand me."

"Is your knowledge of Hinrik such that my statement seems implausible to you?"

Biron was staggered. Visibly and apparently, the remark had struck home. He made no answer.

Artemisia said, "I say it's not so. *Do* you have proof?"

"No direct proof, of course. I was not present at any conferences between your father and the Tyranni. But I can present certain known facts and allow you to make your own inferences. First, the Rancher of Widemos visited Hinrik six months ago. I've said that already. I can add here that he was somewhat over-enthusiastic in his efforts, or perhaps he overestimated Hinrik's discretion. At any rate, he talked more than he should have. My lord Gillbret can verify that."

Gillbret nodded miserably. He faced Artemisia, who had turned to him with moist and angry eyes. "I'm sorry, Arta, but it's true. I've told you this. It was from Widemos that I heard about the Autarch."

The Autarch said, "And it was fortunate for myself that my Lord had developed such long mechanical ears with which to sate his lively curiosity concerning the Director's meetings of state. I was warned of the danger, quite unwittingly, by Gillbret when he first approached me. I left as soon as I could, but the damage, of course, had been done.

"Now, to our knowledge, it was Widemos's only slip, and Hinrik, certainly, has no enviable reputation as a man of any great independence and courage. Your father, Farrill, was arrested within half a year. If not through Hinrik, then how?"

"In our business, we take our chances, Farrill, but he *was* warned. After that, he made no contact, however indirect, with any of us, and destroyed whatever proof of connection with us he had. Some among us believed that he should

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leave the Sector, or, at the very least, go into hiding. He refused to do either.

"I think I can understand why. To alter his way of life would prove the truth of what the Tyranni must have learned, endangered the entire movement. He decided to risk his own life only. He remained in the open.

"For nearly half a year, the Tyranni waited for a betraying gesture. They are patient, the Tyranni. None came, so that when they could wait no longer, they found nothing in their net but him."

"It's a lie!" cried Artemisia. "It's all a lie. It's a smug, sanctimonious, lying story with no truth in it! If all you said were true, they would be watching you, too. You would be in danger yourself."

"My Lady, I do not waste my time. I have already tried to do what I could toward discrediting your father as a source of information. I think I have succeeded somewhat. The Tyranni will wonder if they ought to listen further to a man whose daughter and cousin are obvious traitors. And then again, if they are still disposed to believe him, why, I am on the point of vanishing into the Nebula where they will not find me. I should think my actions tend to prove my story rather than otherwise."

Biron drew a deep breath and said, "Let us consider the interview at an end, Jonti. We have agreed to the extent that we will accompany you and that you will give us needed supplies. That is enough. Granting that all you have just said is true, it is still beside the point. The crimes of the Director of Rhodia do not involve his daughter. Artemisia oth Hinriad stays here with me, provided she agrees."

"I do," said Artemisia.

"Good. I think that covers everything. I warn you, by the way. You are armed; so am I. Your ships are fighters, perhaps; mine is a Tyrannian cruiser."

"Don't be silly, Farrill. My intentions are quite friendly. You wish to keep the girl here? So be it. May I leave by contact airlock?"

Biron nodded. "We will trust you that far."

THE two ships maneuvered closer, until the flexible airlock extensions pouted outward toward one another. Carefully, they edged about, seeking the perfect fit.

The airlock extensions reached out, hovered on the brink of instability and then, with a noiseless jar, the vibrations of which hummed its way into the pilot room, settled into place, clamps automatically locking in position. An airtight seal had been formed.

Biron drew the back of his hand slowly across his forehead and some of the tension oozed out of him.

"There it is," he said.

The Autarch lifted his spacesuit. There was still a thin film of moisture under it.

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"Thanks," he said, pleasantly. "An officer of mine will be right back. You will arrange the details of the supplies necessary with him."

The Autarch left.

BIRON said, "Take care of Jonti's officer for me for a while, will you, Gil? When he comes in, break the airlock contact. All you'll have to do is remove the magnetic field. This is the photonic switch you'll flash."

He turned and stepped out of the pilot room. Right now, he needed time for himself. Time to think, mostly.

But there was the hurried footstep behind him, and the soft voice. He stopped.

"Biron," said Artemisia, "I want to speak to you."

He faced her. "Later, if you don't mind, Arta."

She was looking up at him, intently. "No, now."

Her arms were poised as though she would have liked to embrace him, but was not sure of her receptions. She said, "You didn't believe what he said about my father."

"It has no bearing," said Biron.

"Biron," she began. It was hard for her to say it. "I know that part of what has been going on between us has been because we've been alone and together and in danger, but—" She stopped again.

Biron said, "If you're trying to say you're a Hinriad, Arta, there's no need. I know it. I won't hold you to anything."

"No. Oh, no!" She caught his arm and placed her cheek against his hard shoulder. She was speaking rapidly. "That's not it at all. It doesn't matter about Hinriad and Widemos at all. I—I love you, Biron."

Her eyes went up, meeting his. "I think you love me, too. I think you would admit it if you could forget I were a Hinriad. Maybe you will now that I've said it first. You told the Autarch you would not hold my father's deeds against me. Don't hold his rank against me, either."

Her arms were around his neck now. Biron could feel the softness of her breasts against him and the warmth of her breath on his lips. Slowly his own hands went up and gently grasped her forearms. As gently, he disengaged her arms.

He said, "I am not quits with the Hinriads, my Lady."

She was startled. "You told the Autarch—"

He looked away. "Sorry, Arta. Don't go by what I told the Autarch."

She wanted to cry out that it wasn't true, that her father had not done this thing, that in any case—

But he turned into the cabin and left her standing in the corridor, her eyes filling with hurt and shame.

—ISAAC ASIMOV

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